



Ph.u. 55-5

R.

<36635898500019

<36635898500019

othek

THE
PHILOSOPHICAL
WORKS

Of the late Right Honorable

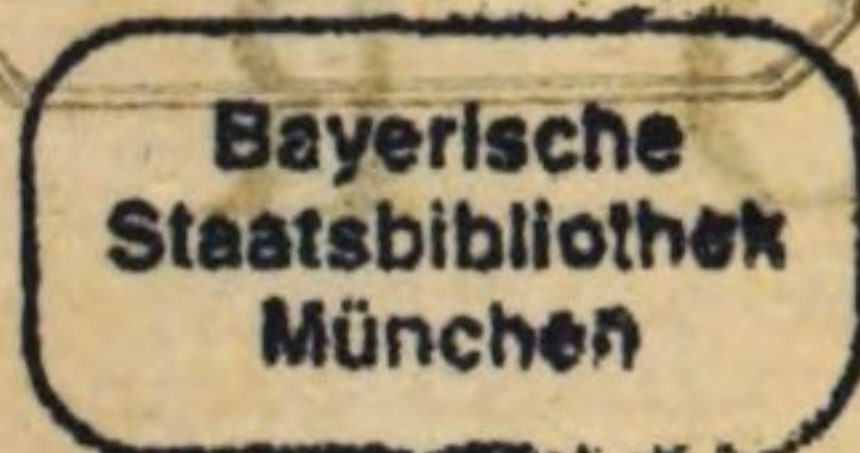
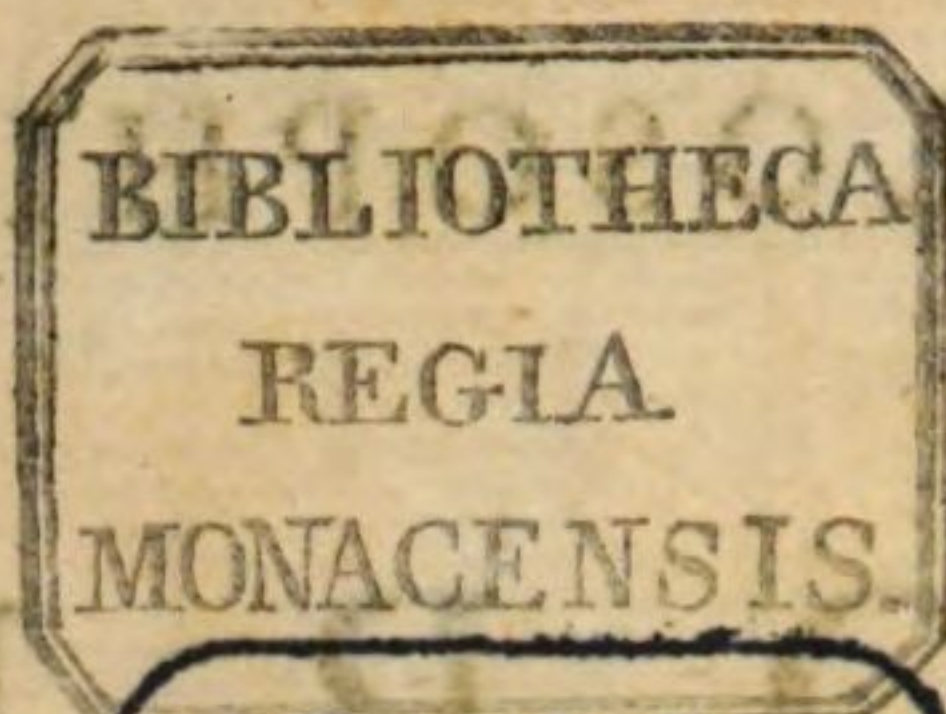
HENRY ST. JOHN,

LORD VISCOUNT BOLINGBROKE.

VOLUME V.

LONDON,

Printed in the Year MDCCLIV.



CONTENTS.

Fragments or minutes of Essays, continued

1--217

The Substance of some Letters written originally in French, about the Year 1720, to M. de POUILLY

217--311

A Letter occasioned by one of archbishop TILLOTSON'S sermons

315--379

CONTENTS

Fragment of minutes of Egypt, continued

1-317

The Sublime of Jean Lelievre, written origi-
nally in French, about the year 1720, to
M. de Rouilly 317-318

A letter addressed by one of archbishop
Tillotson's servants 318-319

FRAGMENTS or MINUTES

O F

ESSAYS.

LII.

IF you improve in your own thoughts the hints dispersed in the precedent reflections, you, whose good understanding is undebauched by metaphysics, will see very evidently the truth of these two propositions. First, that, supposing the world we inhabit to be a scene of as many evils, as it is represented to be, the arguments drawn from thence against the wisdom, or power, or goodness of God, are inconclusive. God is the creator and governor of the universe, not of this world alone, a small, and, probably, a very inconsiderable part of it: so that, if there was really more evil than good in this part, it would conclude nothing against the whole, wherein there might be still much more good than evil, nor, consequently, against the divine attributes. Secondly, that there is even in this world so much more good than evil, and the general state of mankind is so happy in it, that the exaggerated descriptions of a supposed contrary state would make no impression against these attributes, if men had not been induced to think most absurdly that God

could have no good reason for creating them, but that of communicating happiness to them, and happiness such as they would have, happiness without alloy. The accusation brought against the goodness of God is founded, therefore, on a false representation, and an arbitrary supposition. Modern philosophers are more to be blamed on this account, than the ancients. They have a nobler view of the immense universe. They know that this planet is a part of it. How then can they assume that this part was made for one species of the animals it produces, rather than for the whole system? Divines are still more to be blamed, than mere philosophers. A confederacy with atheists becomes ill the professors of theism, and, less than any, those who pretend to teach it. No matter: they persist; and, having done their best, in concert with their allies, to destroy the belief of the goodness of God, they endeavour to destroy that of his justice, which is a further article of their alliance. I have said already, that, lest the bare existence of physical and moral evil should not afford the atheists color enough to deny the being of God, nor the divines a sufficient foundation to erect an heaven and an hell, they proceed to consider these evils relatively to the distribution of them, and they pronounce this distribution unjust. Their declamations are heard on this subject with a double advantage, the partiality of love, and the prejudice of aversion. Men are apt to pass easily, and silently, over the good, and complain loudly of the

the evil by which they are affected in their own persons, or in the persons of those whom they approve. As easily, and silently, do they pass over the evil, which they never think sufficient, and complain loudly of the good, which they always think too much, that falls to the share of those whom they disapprove, or who stand on any account in opposition to them. On such motives they are induced to charge the providence of God with injustice. But here the confederacy breaks. The atheist concludes once more that there is no God. The divine still maintains that there is one. How well they both support the charge, how effectually the latter re-asserts the justice of the Supreme Being, we are now to enquire. And I persuade myself that you will be under some surprise to find a charge so groundless, that has been so long and so clamorously brought, and an hypothesis so weak, that has prevailed so long and so generally among theists. I know not whether the natural temper and disposition of mankind, by which we must account for one, or the political and private interests, by which we must account for the other, will take off this surprise till you have considered them thoroughly in their rise and progress, and found them to be permanent causes of permanent effects. Then, indeed, your surprise will cease, because you will find nothing in this case, which you will not find in many others; that is, error established and perpetuated by affections, passions, interest, and authority among men, in opposition to the plainest dictates of their reason.

THAT good men are often unhappy, and bad men happy, has been a subject of invective rather, than of argument, to EPICURUS, to COTTA, and to others among the antients. It has been too nearly so in the writings of some of the moderns, and little less in those of some eminent divines. I have quoted CLARKE on several occasions. I must quote him on this. In his Evidences of natural and revealed religion *, as well as in his Demonstration of the being and attributes of God †, he presumes to say, “ It is certain and
 “ necessary, even as certain as the moral attri-
 “ butes of God” (and he had before affirmed the moral to be as essential to the divine nature, as the natural, and therefore as certain as God’s existence) “ that there must be, at some time or
 “ other, such a revolution and renovation of
 “ things, such a future state of existence of the
 “ same persons, as that, by an exact distribution
 “ of rewards and punishments therein, all the pre-
 “ sent disorders, and inequalities, may be set
 “ right, and that the whole scheme of providence
 “ may appear, at it’s consummation, to be a de-
 “ sign worthy of infinite wisdom, justice, and
 “ goodness.” At it’s consummation ; for it appears, actually, unworthy of them, as these men not only imply, but say. The hypothetical certainty and necessity, on which the doctor is willing to risque our acknowledgment of a Supreme Being, or our denial of him, is founded on this

* p. 130.

† p. 131.

assertion,

assertion, “that rewards and punishments, in general, are necessary to support the honor of God, and of his law and government;” and on this assumed proposition, “that the condition of mankind in this present state is such, that the natural order of things is perverted, and virtue and goodness prevented from obtaining their proper and due effects.” Audacious and vain sophist! His whole chain of reasoning, from the moral attributes of God downwards, is nothing more, than one continued application of moral human ideas to the designs and conduct of God: and, in this case, he assumes, most presumptuously, that the scheme and order of things, which God has established in this system of ours, are such, as cannot be reconciled even to the notions of human justice. His terms have a very solemn air, that may impose on the unwary, and confirm the habitual prejudices of others: but he who analyses them, and attends to the sense of them, will perceive that more absurdity cannot be stuffed into so few words.

To begin this analyse; let us consider the terms good and bad, happy and unhappy, as they stand here applied. Men will be never agreed about the former; the latter can never be ascertained: and, consequently, the proposition, that good men are unhappy, and bad men happy, should not be advanced in the sense in which it is advanced, and as if the natural order of things was perverted: for what is the natural order of things? It is that

which the author of nature has established, and according to which evil may happen sometimes to the good, and good to the bad : but according to which, likewise, virtue can never lead to unhappiness, nor vice to happiness. It is false, therefore, to say that the natural order is actually perverted, as if unhappiness was really become the consequence of virtue, and happiness of vice, in the course of human affairs. But now, who are the good ? who are the bad ? If by the good are intended such as conform themselves to the law of nature, and by the bad such as violate this law, the words are very equivocal, and must appear so in their applications. Men differ in nothing more, than in the characters they impute to one another, even in their private thoughts ; and when they agree the most, it is very possible they may not judge as God judges, tho they pretend to judge by the same rule, which they call the eternal reason of things. Those whom they admire for great achievements, they call great ; those who have done them good, they call good ; and often confound the two. So that the justice of divine providence is condemned or acquitted on the fallible and interested judgments of men.

Such indeed they are. Go back to the early ages of the world. Consider their heroes and their demi-gods, observe by what goodness they acquired the honors of deification. They destroyed sometimes robbers or wild beasts. Others of them sowed corn, planted the vine, and invented

vented useful arts. Did these alone constitute good men according to the law of nature? By no means. Not even the last. Of all the cardinal virtues, fortitude seems chiefly to have been cultivated by the heroes of antiquity; and, notwithstanding some good that they did, their rapes, their duels, their battles, the injuries they offered, and the vengeance they took, made them at once objects of admiration, and plagues to mankind. When we descend to later ages, more enlightened by philosophy, and more renowned for wisdom of government, we find the characters of good and bad men rather more equivocal, and much honor done to great vices, as well as to great virtues, according to the modes and prevalent passions of the time, which sanctified, by the help of prepossession and flattery, such actions as right reason can never approve. If we judge by this, and by this alone we should judge, what shall we think of those roman and greek worthies, for instance, whose names and actions have been delivered down by their historians so pompously to posterity? I might call in question the chastity of *Scipio* *, and the fidelity of *Regulus* to his parole. I might doubt, on the face of their history, and without any more particular anecdotes, whether *Drusus* was a less factious citizen than *Saturninus*. I might bring reasons to excuse, perhaps to justify, the *Gracchi*. I might prove, by some letters of *Cicero* to *Atticus*, that the se-

* Vid. *AUL. GELLII*.

cond BRUTUS was the vilest of usurers. But I wave such particulars, as we have not, for the most part, sufficient means of examining; and I ask; whether the best of these men, in the best days of the roman or grecian commonwealths, were not the instruments of ambition, of avarice, of injustice, and cruelty? They were great men most certainly; but their goodness was often problematical in Greece, as well as at Rome. When revealed religions arose, a true one like the christian, a false one like the mahometan, the same uncertainty remained, and the same fallacious judgments were made about morality. But there arose too a new sort of goodness at the same time, for we need attempt to go no further back: and about this men can never be agreed. The Christians pass for ill men among the Mahometans, the Mahometans among the Christians; the sects of OMAR and ALI censure each other; we tax your church with superstition and idolatry; she taxes ours with heresy and schism: and thus contrary judgments are passed on one another, not only by particular men, but by whole communities. It may be said that these judgments are not passed as generally, and as rashly, as I pretend; and that the Christian, who condemns the mahometan, or the Mahometan, who condemns the christian religion, may distinguish very truly at the same time between the good and the bad men of the contrary party. But if it be said, it will not hold; for the new sort of goodness, which has been mentioned, is that, not only as much, but more than

moral

moral goodness, by a regard or disregard to which the justice of God, in the dispensations of providence, is tried in every religion that claims the prerogative of a revealed system, and according to which it is assumed that men will be rewarded or punished hereafter. Such has been, and such is, the state of this matter.

LET us consider next the terms happy and unhappy. They are more vague, and less easy to be ascertained in their application, than the others. Agreeable sensations, the series whereof constitutes happiness, must arise from health of body, tranquillity of mind, and a competency of wealth: An absolute privation of all these we are not to suppose. The case cannot happen; or, if it could, an immediate end would be put to the miserable being. But, how shall we judge for other men of the several degrees, in which they enjoy all or any of these? How shall we make up their several accounts of agreeable and disagreeable sensations, and pronounce their state to be, according to the balance, tolerable, or happy, or very happy? To pretend to it is at least as absurd, as to pretend to measure the degrees of goodness; since neither of them consists so much in outward shew, as it does in the inward sentiment: and yet, without being able to measure both, what saucy, what pragmatical presumption is it to pretend, in any sort, to judge of providential dispensations, even supposing them to be those of particular providences?

LIII.

WE will enter, if you please, first into some reflections on the general tendency of virtue and vice to promote happiness, and after that into a more particular detail. I think then that health of body is pretty equally distributed to good men and bad, whether Jews, Christians, Turks, or Infidels. In this respect too the good are likely to have in themselves, and in their posterity, much the advantage. But, besides, if health and vigor of body were to be found more commonly among the wicked, than the good, it might appear to be, like other instances of prosperity, the cause, it will never appear to be the effect, of vice.

TRANQUILLITY of mind is the inseparable companion of virtue, that adds relish and favour to all the comforts, and takes off their bitter taste from all the misfortunes of life. It is the health of the mind. Without this, no intellectual joy can be tasted, as without the other no corporeal pleasure. The virtuous man looks back with complacency, and feels the truth of that saying of TULLY: "A good conscience is the great theatre of virtue." The present satisfies him, and the future gives him no alarm. The second BRUTUS exclaimed, that virtue was an empty name. Stoical virtue was little better; nor his, in particular, any thing more than a mask, that hid, under an appearance of apathy, the most violent and the vilest passions; like the sanctity

sanctity of several antient and modern saints who have imposed on the christian world. But true moral virtue is something very real. It is the cause of our happiness, it maintains the tranquillity of human life. If happiness be a series of agreeable sensations, the less this series is exposed to interruption, the more happy we are. But it must be exposed to perpetual interruptions, if that which causes, and maintains it, be not in our own power. Virtue is so: and thus virtue may be said, without any paradox, to be it's own reward *. If it has no reward from without, it rewards itself by inward, and therefore independent tranquillity.

Good men may have commonly a less share in the advantages of fortune, as they are less likely to use the means of acquiring them; but then they want them less: and tho it be a false thought, which SENECA makes the divinity employ, “that
“their happiness consists in wanting no happiness †,” yet is it true that their happiness is enhanced, as well as secured, by a great independence on every thing external; and the same SENECA says, some where else, most divinely well, that he placed the good things he enjoyed within his reach, and yet at such a distance, that fortune might take, but could not tear, them from him. The good man

* Hoc dabitur, ut opinor, si modo sit aliquid, esse beatum, id oportere totum poni in potestate sapientis. Nam si amitti vita beata potest, beata esse non potest. TULL. De fin. L. ii.

† Intus omne posui bonum. Non carere felicitate felicitas vestra est. De provid.

flakes his thirst with a moderate draught of outward prosperity. The chalice of the wicked man is never sufficient, be it ever so large: and to all his passions, as well as to his avarice, “nescio quid curtae semper abest rei.” There is a fragment among PLUTARCH’S Miscellanies, where Fortune and Vice are introduced like the contractors, who appear and make their offers, when any public work is to be let out. Fortune boasts that she can take from men every outward good, and bring upon them every outward evil. Vice replies that this is true, but that it is not sufficient to make them miserable, unless she gives her assistance; whereas she is able to render them so without the assistance of Fortune, and in spite of all her endeavours to make them happy.

THUS heathen philosophers taught mankind; and there was no need of defending the providence of God against ZENO, or ARISTOTLE. The former held that there was no real good but virtue. The latter, that health of body, and the external advantages of fortune, might be reckoned among the good things of life, but that they were such in a degree very far below those that result from virtue. Happiness, therefore, fell solely to the share of good men according to the Stoicians; or principally to them, according to the Peripatetics*:

* Pugnant stoici cum peripateticis. Alteri negant quidquam esse bonum nisi quod honestum sit. Alteri plurimum se, et longe longeque plurimum tribuere honestati; sed tamen et in corpore, et extra, esse quaedam bona. Certamen honestum, et disputatio splendida. TULL. De fin. L. ii.

and

and this was indeed a noble contest. Christians are far from having any such. If they do not assume that health, and the advantages of fortune, constitute happiness solely, they assume that it is constituted principally by these; since on the want which good men have sometimes of these they accuse God of injustice. They pretend to keep an account between God and man, to barter so much virtue, or so many acts of devotion, against so many degrees of honor, of power, of riches; and to have their piety purchased by the gratification of their passions. If God exacts the duty, he must pay the price. If he does not pay it in this life, he must pay it in another. Till that time, they give him credit: and if he does not pay it then, he is an unjust and cruel being. I will crayon out a picture on this occasion in imitation of those CLEANTHES used to draw when he disputed against the partisans of voluptu. Let all good Christians, to denote their goodness and the justice of God, be fat and jolly, like the canons in the Lutrin. Let them be seated on thrones with diadems on their heads, sceptres in their hands, and purple robes on their shoulders. Let the Virtues, like so many Cupids in ALBANO's pictures, run about the landscape, busy in the service of their masters. Let Justice lead the wicked like slaves with retorted arms, and down-cast eyes, to their footstools. Let Temperance serve pyramids of ortolans and brimmers of tockay on their tables. Let Moderation offer, and they receive, sacks filled with gold and silver, and baskets full of diamonds and rubies. In the midst, and front, of
the

the piece let the great LAMA of the east be placed on an higher throne than the rest, if it be sent to some tartarian temple: his younger brother of the west, if it be sent to St. Peter's church at Rome: his grace of Canterbury, or my lord of London, if it be sent to St. Paul's; and LUTHER or CALVIN, if it be sent to any other religious assembly of Christians in these parts of the world.

HAVING said thus much to shew the general tendency of virtue to promote the inward and real happiness of mankind, in opposition to divines, and atheists, who make it consist so much in outward enjoyments, that every diminution of these, in the circumstances of every reputed good man, is an instance brought in proof of the unjust dispensations of providence; I proceed to take notice of some particular instances that have been so brought. They will serve, I think, to shew that God is wise, and man a fool; and that of all fools the most presumptuous, and, at the same time, the most trifling, are metaphysical philosophers and divines.

I NEITHER deny nor affirm particular providences. The supposition of such has given occasion to much lying, to much flattery, to much uncharitableness, to much superstition and enthusiasm. When the votive pictures of those who had escaped being drowned were shewn to DIAGORAS at Samothracia, he asked where the pictures were of those who had perished at sea? The atheist believed no providence, for

for he believed no God. The priests would not have been over much concerned to convince him of a general providence. But they would have produced their legends, as well as their relics, to prove to him the particular providences by which their votaries had been saved. I enter here no further into the discussion of this point. But this I say, that the physical and moral systems have no need, like the bungling works and imperfect institutions of men, to be carried on by frequent interpositions and partial directions, that they may continue to answer the intent of the maker. The ordinary course of things, preserved and conducted by a general providence, confirms what the law of reason and of nature teaches us. The law is not only given, but executed. The authority of the law-giver makes it our duty, the sanctions make it our interest to obey the law, and these sanctions have their effect so often, that they leave no doubt concerning them. They have their effect as often as it is necessary in terrorem. In imitation of providential government, human government goes no further: and yet there are a parcel of little tyrants who find fault with the former for going no further. God punishes to reform as far, as our nature and his scheme permit. They are angry that he is not as angry, as they are, that every criminal is not racked on the wheel, and that he does not punish to exterminate. Let us descend to particular instances that are urged against the justice of God, in order to prove it, and to confirm what has been said concerning good, and bad, happy, and unhappy, men.

LIV.

TULLY lies still open before me, and there I find many instances of this sort produced by COTTA with as much confidence, as if they were decisive. Why did the two SCIPIOS fall in Spain, and MARCELLUS and PAULUS in Italy, making war against the Carthaginians? Why did MAXIMUS bury his son who was of consular dignity? Why was the emilian SCIPIO not safe in his own house? Why was RUTILIUS banished, DRUSUS assassinated, SCAEVOLA slain at the altar of VESTA, and CATULUS obliged to procure his own death? Why did MARIUS die in his bed, after a seventh consulship? Why were he, and CINNA, DIONYSIUS the elder, PISISTRATUS, PHALARIS, APOLLODORUS, and even the assassin VARIUS, and the highwayman HARPALUS, suffered so long to exercise, with impunity, their cruelties? The day would be too short, indeed, to enumerate instances of any kind in this declamatory, loose, and inconclusive manner*. It is not unlike the proceeding of certain great scholars, who crowd their text and their margin with a multitude of names, which stand as vouchers of the facts or opinions they advance, and impose often on the unwary who will not, and the ignorant who cannot, examine for themselves; whilst they, who will and can examine, discover these pretended vouchers to be

* Dies deficiat si velim numerare quibus bonis male evenerit; nec minus, si commemorem quibus improbis optime.

sometimes

sometimes of no authority, sometimes of neither, and sometimes of the contrary side. I could point out signal examples of this sort in the writings of admired authors: and we might have seen some such perhaps on this occasion, if CicerO had made BALBUS reply to COTTA, as he makes him lay in a claim to do with no small confidence.

I REGRET the want of this reply much more on account of facts, than arguments; for the Stoics were great logicians, and pitiful reasoners. Their whole philosophy was little more than a perpetual play with words: and, on this occasion for instance, to have replied in character, BALBUS must have insisted that pain is not an evil, as POSIDONIUS did, when he roared out in a fit of the gout*. He might have owned it to be something rough, abhorrent to nature, difficult to be borne, melancholy, and hard. He might have applied the definition of evil to the sensation of pain, but must not have called it by that name, because the Portic had decreed that there is no evil but in vice, nor any good but in virtue. No matter. He would have set very probably the facts, which COTTA quoted, in a different light, and would have shewn by a fuller and more accurate state of them, that they

* Concludunt ratiunculis stoici cur non sit malum; quasi de verbo, non de re laboretur. - - - Asperum est, contra naturam, difficile perpeffu, triste, durum. Haec copia verborum est; quod omnes uno verbo malum appellamus, id tot modis posse discere. Definis tu mihi, non tollis dolorem. Tusc. Disp. L. ii.

were insufficient to his purpose. It is very probable he would have done this, since we have good reason, even at this time, to doubt the exact truth of some of these anecdotes, and to suspect both prejudice and partiality in the characters.

I know not whether BALBUS would have called in question the story of REGULUS. It was probably fabulous in many circumstances at least, and there were those among the Romans who thought it to be so *. But it served to blacken the Carthaginians, to whom they bore an immortal hatred, and popular prejudice kept it in credit at Rome: as we see that many false traditions about the Saracens and the Turks have been kept up for several ages, and are so still, notwithstanding the detection of them, in christian nations. Their poets, and their orators, sanctified the tale for the honor of the roman name, as the most illustrious instance of magnanimity, fortitude, and a religious attachment to engagements taken even with an enemy, that was ever given. BALBUS then might have rejected the story; or, taking it for true, he might have insisted that it furnished an example of human virtue, but none of divine injustice. He might have made REGULUS a voluntary martyr, as SENECA makes the philosopher DIOGENES a confessor, of natural religion.

ONE of these Stoicians might have anticipated the answers which the other of them gave to such

* Vid. AUL. GELLIIUM.

examples as that of RUTILIUS, who was banished, or that of MAXIMUS, who lost a son arrived to consular honors. He would have said of such men as these, that they were unfortunate, but not unhappy; that they were moved, but not overcome*. He might have pushed his argument against CORTA further, on the principles of the Portic. He might have maintained that the misfortunes of some good men are designed as lessons to all by providence, in whose dispensations more regard is had to mankind, than to particular men†. In general, we place happiness and unhappiness very blindly, and very falsely. Providence endeavours to open our eyes, when things, that we esteem evils, happen to the good. But we pervert the argument. Instead of concluding that such things are not real evils, we harken to the prejudices of imagination; we believe, and, by believing, we make them such, and then we accuse this very providence of injustice. Even the privation of an imaginary good is esteemed a positive evil, the want of riches for instance. The man of Rofs was envied by none. CHARTRES and WALTERS, whom you have rendered immortal, were envied by many. This folly prevails so far, that men have imagined the Supreme Being best pleased when his temples have glittered with gold and silver. If you was of this opinion, as most of

* - - - Sentit illa, sed vincit. SEN. De provid.

† - - - - Pro universis, quorum major diis cura est, quam singulorum. Ib.

your communion are, and thought God more honored on this account at St. Peter's, than at St. Paul's, I would quote to you these verses:

Jupiter Ammon

Pauper adhuc deus est, nullis violata per aevum
Divitiis delubra tenens, morumque priorum
Numen Romano templum defendit ab auro*.

THE examples of those good citizens of Rome, who came to untimely ends, would not have embarrassed our Stoician. He would have asked his antagonist, what pretence could be found to accuse providence of injustice because men who waged war were sometimes killed, or because men who mingled in civil contests were exposed to the mutual resentments of exasperated parties? He would have asked, who could determine when it was best for him to die? Prolongation of days delivers men over, very often, to misery they would have escaped if they had died sooner, and changes the whole color of their lives: so that the good or evil, that remains in store for us at any age, being uncertain, we can neither pronounce a man unhappy because he dies, nor happy before he dies. SOLON † taught this apophthegm to CROESUS, who lived to see it verified in his own case, and to reverence that wisdom when he was the captive of CYRUS, to which he had paid little regard while he sat on the throne of LYDIA.

* LACT. L. ix.

†

Dicique beatum

Ante obitum nemo supremaque funera debet.

Rome, who made all the nations from the Euphrates to the western ocean tremble, trembled herself when POMPEY fell sick at Naples. POMPEY recovered. “*Multae urbes et publica vota vicerunt.*” But he recovered only to wage the civil war with his father-in-law, to take arms without being prepared to take them, to abandon Italy, to be beaten in Greece, and to be murdered by servile hands in Egypt †. Such a subject as POMPEY, of such a common-wealth as the roman, may be paired with the greatest princes. Let me mention, therefore, the late king of France, on this occasion, and to the same purpose. He had passed more than forty years in the greatest prosperity when CHARLES the second of Spain died. Had he died at the same time, when that rich succession came into his family, his death would have been thought the more deplorable on this very account. He lived; he outlived his glory, his power, and, if I may say so, almost his posterity. It might have been said of him:

renovata

*Semper clade domus, multis in luctibus, inque
Perpetuo moerore, et nigra veste senescit.*

BALBUS would have shewn that the examples brought of prosperous iniquity were neither more just, nor more applicable, than those of the misery of good men. If he had allowed that MARIUS had the happiness, such an one as it is, of

† - - - - Non enim cum socero bellum gessisset, non imparatus arma sumpisset, etc. Tusc. Disp. L. ii.

dying in his bed like his rival SYLLA, who took the appellation of happy very ostentatiously and very unjustly; yet he would not have allowed this other man of blood the same appellation. Notwithstanding his elevation from the plough, which he followed for hire, to the highest dignities of the commonwealth *, notwithstanding his victories and triumphs, it would be difficult to find, in the roman or any other history, a man whose crimes were more constantly punished, or whose life was a series of more misery. Besides his bodily infirmities, besides the

Exilium, et carcer, Minturnarumque paludes,
Et mendicatus victa Carthagine panis,

he was tossed in all the storms he raised. His blood was every moment ready to flow, and the victorious sword of SYLLA hung over his head. The various scenes of misery, through which he made others go, were revenged by those through which he went himself. There is a lively description of both in the second book of the Pharsalia †: and if we read his life, we shall incline to think that prosperity was measured out to him for the punishment of others, and misery, in proportion, for his own, the executioner and the victim, alternately, of divine justice.

*

Solebat

Poscere mercedes alieno lassus aratro. Juv.

†

- - - - - Omnia passo,

Quae peior fortuna potest, atque omnibus uso

Quae melior.

Non

Non ille favore

Numinis ingenti superum protectus ab ira,
Vir ferus, et Romam cupienti perdere fato
Sufficiens.

If he lived to a greater age than his brother and his son, it was in order to make him more miserable, as he had been more criminal, than they. But even they resembled him in misery, as they had resembled him in cruelty. His brother was put to a painful death at the tomb of CATULUS, and his son fell on his sword in despair. Let me make another observation. MARIUS laid the foundations of his fortune on his ingratitude and treachery to METELLUS, whose lieutenant-general he had been in the jugurthine war. SYLLA had been quaestor to MARIUS in the same war. SYLLA ruined his party, defeated his designs, and scattered his ashes in the river *. Surely COTTA, when he accused the justice of God for giving prosperity to wicked men, could not have produced a more glaring proof of the contrary.

He was not more lucky in other examples of the same sort. Our Stoician would have opposed to him, for instance, the different accounts of authors concerning the elder DIONYSIUS; some of whom related how this tyrant had been tormented by the Furies, and had perished by the treachery of his

† Erutos cineres in Anienis alveum sparfit. VAL. MAX.
l. ix. c. 2.

own family, whilst all of them concurred in representing his whole life to have been a state of misery. What, indeed, could be more miserable than the perpetual terror and universal distrust, wherein he passed his days? PLUTARCH relates, and BALBUS might know long before PLUTARCH wrote, that this wretched man dared not trust any barber to shave him; that no one, not his brother, not his son, was suffered to come into his apartment till he had been stripped and searched, and had changed his cloaths; and that the tyrant owned himself afraid even of the best of his friends: so that if he reigned eight and thirty years, as COTTA says, he was eight and thirty years miserable. A noble instance truly of the prosperity of the wicked!

OUR Stoician would have shewn, perhaps, that the example of PISISTRATUS was not pertinent. He used violence to gain, and, more than once, to regain, the supreme power at Athens, as GELO and HIERO did in Sicily, as others used it against him, and as it must always happen when parties contend for power. But when he had got this power, he used it well, like those sicilian princes: and tho he was called a tyrant, in the bad sense of the word, by the party opposed to him, yet he shewed the licentious Greeks how much a limited monarchy, for he limited his by the laws and advice of SOLON, was preferable to one of their turbulent and tyrannical democracies. PHALARIS was a monster in cruelty; but the people of Agrigentum

gentum roasted him in his own bull, after he had roasted the maker of it; and the Orchomenians took a severe vengeance on APOLLODORUS. The same would have been observed to have happened to other tyrants among the Greeks, to CINNA among the Romans, and to other inferior villains, such as VARIUS, who stabbed DRUSUS and poisoned METELLUS; such as HARPALUS, whose long success in robbery bore testimony against the gods; as DIOGENES the cynic, who barked against them, and whom COTTA condescends to quote, presumed to say,

BUT the pontiff would not have been silenced by these answers. He had a reply ready. “*Prohiberi melius fuit impediri que.*” It had been better in the gods to hinder these men from doing so much mischief, than to leave them to vengeance afterwards. Now I think that BALBUS would have treated this reply as a mere evasion, grounded on a false supposition, and, even with that help, insufficient. The men spoken of, would he have said, are far from enjoying inward happiness, whatever outward prosperity may attend the course of their wicked lives. They live in danger, in fear, and in perpetual anguish of mind. Their punishment, therefore, is not deferred: and if they are suffered long to punish others, they are ministers and proofs at the same time of that divine justice which I defend. Their prosperity serves to this very purpose. A DIONYSIUS, or a CINNA, or any other inhuman tyrant, is to be
looked

looked upon like one of those monsters which the poets feigned. Like a minotaur fed with human flesh, or such a boar as executed DIANA's vengeance in Aetolia. Bolts of destroying thunder go out of their mouths*. Their very breath scatters desolation around. When the monster has inflicted the punishment he was sent to inflict, when the measure of his iniquity, and of God's justice, is filled, a THESEUS or a MELEAGER is raised up, and he perishes.

THIS is the general course of things, which infinite wisdom has constituted; and the examples of the few, who suffer necessarily, tho occasionally, according to it, are sufficient to give a warning to all men, that they are inexcusable if they do not take. COTTA, who exercises greater injustice towards God, than any of the tyrants he quotes did towards men, is much scandalized that those two eyes of the mediterranean coast, Corinth and Carthage, were put out. CRITOLAUS violated the respect that was due to the roman legates. ASDRUBAL used much cruelty to the roman captives. These were the immediate causes of the ruin of those two republics, and MEMMIUS and SCIPIO were the instruments of pride, of ambition, and of insatiable resentment. God could have prevented these destructions no doubt: "Sub-
" venire certe potuit, et conservare urbes tantas

* Ultorem spreta per agros

Misit aprum.

Fulmen ab ore venit, frondes afflatibus ardent.

OVID. Metam. l. viii.

" atque

“atque tales.” But how did the pontiff know that MEMMIUS and SCIPIO were not instruments of the justice of providence, as well as of roman policy and passion? The worst men, and the Romans were none of the best, are employed to punish the worst. None so fit for the task. They are the instruments, and in their turns the examples, of divine justice. The wealth, the splendor, the magnificence of Corinth were great; but Corinth was a sink of iniquity. Carthage was a great and powerful state; but the Carthaginians were a faithless, factious, and cruel people. Might not these be the remote and true causes, whatever the immediate and apparent were, of their destruction? Was God obliged to save them by an extraordinary interposition against the ordinary course of his providence, because their neighbours admired or feared them? The Romans had no advantage in real virtue over the Carthaginians, tho they had it greatly in policy, order, discipline, and a certain enthusiastic zeal for the grandeur of their empire, and the glory of the roman name. If we had PHILISTUS, or any of the carthaginian historians in our hands, we should see very evidently, what we may collect from those of Rome, that romana fides was, or deserved to be, a proverbial term of reproach in Afric, as much as punica fides in Italy. Let us take then occasion to adore the wisdom and justice of divine providence from an example brought in opposition to the latter. The Romans destroyed Carthage, and by her destruction prepared the way

way to their own. At the very time when CORTA lamented that of Corinth and Carthage, that of Rome was coming on; for the loss of her liberty was connected with that of her empire by a scarce interrupted succession of tyrants. Under these she lay, as it were, on the rack, and died a lingering and painful death.

LV.

IN asserting the justice of providence, I chuse rather to insist on the constant, visible, and undeniable course of a general providence, which is sufficient for the purpose, than to assume a dispensation of particular providences. The atheist, who assumes that there ought to be such, complains that they are wanting. The theist, who admits that there are such, complains that they are insufficient. The former draws from what he assumes, a pretence to cavil. The latter only grows inconsistent; for I would ask him, if there are any such providences, why not more? He admits enough to break through and overturn the natural order and constitution of the physical and moral system. How comes it to pass that there are not enough to stop his mouth when he complains of the misery of man, and the injustice of providence? The truth is, that we have not in philosophical speculation, in any history except that of the bible, nor in our own experience, sufficient grounds to establish the doctrine of particular providences, and to reconcile it to that of a general providence, which continues, and directs the course of things in the material and intellectual systems

systems as these systems were originally constituted by the author of nature. They who have attempted to do this by shewing with great, and, as I think, with too much subtilty of wit and licence of imagination, in what cases, how far, and in what manner, God may act by particular and occasional interpositions, consistently with the preservation of that general order of causes and effects which he has constituted, seem to me quite unintelligible. It is impossible to conceive that the course of the sun, or the double revolution of the earth, should be suspended or altered by a temporary, nay, a momentary interposition of some particular providence, or that any thing worthy of such an interposition should happen in the material world, without violating the mechanical constitution of it, and the natural order of causes and effects in it. As little is it possible to conceive such occasional interpositions in the intellectual system, as shall give new thoughts and new dispositions to the minds of men, and in consequence new determinations to their wills, without altering in every such instance the ordinary and natural progression of human understanding, nor without resuming that freedom of will, which every man is conscious that he has, tho some are absurd enough to deny it, and to oppose metaphysical dreams to intuitive knowledge. I confess that I comprehend as little the metaphysical, as the physical, impulse of spirits* ; and that the

* Relig. of nat. delineated, et alibi.

words,

words, suggestion, silent communication, sudden influence, influx, or injection of ideas, give me no determinate, clear, and distinct ideas, nor even, as I suspect, to the persons who talk of them the most, and build so much upon them.

To acknowledge the fatum of antient philosophers, to hold with the Mahometans an absolute predestination of all events, with SPINOZA and CALVIN the necessity of all our actions, or with LEIBNITZ his whimsy of a pre-established harmony, would be somewhat almost as mad, as to take the True history of LUCIAN for such. On the other hand, it would be absurd, and impious both, to assert with EPICURUS that the world was made by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, and that, as it was made so, it is governed by chance, without any knowledge, without any rule, without any providence. The truth lies between these extremes. The world is governed by laws, which the Creator imposed on the physical and moral systems when he willed them into existence, which make a part of them, which must be in force as long as they last, and any change in which would be a change of the systems themselves. These laws are invariable, but they are general; and from this generality what we call contingency arises. The laws of matter and motion, those which we know, and those which have not been yet discovered, are fixed, no doubt. But, within the latitude which they allow tho nothing happens which is repugnant to them, many things happen

happen which seem so to us. Plastic or fashioning nature produces sometimes monsters ; and all material beings, as they partake of the good, partake of the evil, which matter and motion cause ; for it would be trifling to object the assumed existence of beings, material indeed, like the saints in heaven, if those glorified bodies are material according to our idea of matter, but existing in systems that are not liable to the same inconveniencies or evils that arise from matter and motion, such as pain, sickness, or death, for instance, which our system is. There is no need of any great sagacity to perceive that the case is much the same in the moral world ; nay, that it is more liable to contingency than the natural. The moral world is subject to the law of right reason, fixed, invariable, promulgated in the very nature of things, and enforced by the sanctions of rewards and punishments, which follow often the observation or the breach of it. But then, instead of two principles, whereof one is active, and the other passive only, as in the other case, there are in this two active principles, tho' one be slower than the other, reason and passion. Both necessary in the human state ; both useful when reason, both hurtful when passion governs. Between both stands the freedom of our will, which can determine either way : and from this constitution arises all that mixture of moral good and evil that we see and feel.

As little as the atheist and the divine approve the
natural

natural and moral constitution of the world, they are unable to shew how it might be altered in any particular instance, except for the worse upon the whole; and, therefore, they must be reduced at last to assert that goodness and justice require the whole should be altered, as they required originally that there should have been no such system made. In the first light, they deserve to be treated like froward children, who complain, and wish, and know neither what they want, nor what they desire. In the second, they deserve to be treated like patients, proper for doctor MONRO, and to be put under his care. Nothing less than metaphysics could have turned so many good heads. Common sense and common observation would have hindered them from assuming, on the faith of this fantastical science, that God made the world for the sake of man; and man for this reason alone, that he might communicate happiness to his creature: which two suppositions are affirmed or implied in all their arguments, and thus a large field of complaint is opened to them. Without these they would have had no pretence to criticise the works of God, or the dispensations of his providence, to upbraid his goodness, or to censure his justice. On the contrary, they would have found reason to admire, thankfully and submissively, that supreme wisdom, which has provided so amply, by a few general laws, for the well-being of all his creatures. But it is with this very instance of supreme wisdom that they find fault. General laws, under the direction of a general

neral providence, do not provide sufficiently for human happiness, according to them; and their notions of human importance are wound up so high, that they think there ought to be as many providences as men; on which notion guardian-angels, and genii, and demons were introduced, and are hardly yet exploded: or else that the immediate providence of God should be attentive to all the wants and prayers of men, tho the wants are often imaginary, and the prayers impertinent; and should be ready on every occasion to protect and reward the good, to punish and reclaim the wicked.

EVERY religion boasts of many instances, wherein the divine providence has been thus exercised. We need go no further than our own ecclesiastical historians, and other christian writers, to find them. The most common events are represented by exaggeration and declamation to have been extraordinary interpositions of the hand of God. Nay, at this time, there is many an old woman who thinks herself as important as your and GAY's parish clerk; and is ready to relate, with much spiritual pride, the particular providences that have attended her and hers. Thus then the matter stands. The same persons who have contributed to establish this belief, have propagated, and continue to propagate an opinion, that the Supreme Being deals unjustly with mankind in this life, because the interpositions of his providence are not as frequent as they judge that they ought to be. I say as frequent; for where

they assume that he does interpose, they dare not say he interposes unjustly. CLARKE complains *, that there are not in many ages plain evidences enough of the interposition of divine providence, to convince men of the wisdom any more, than of the justice and goodness, of God. They reason like CORTA †, they are displeased at the few particular instances of this care; few, as they conceive, with respect to all the proper objects of it: and since he takes it in so few instances, his justice is no more acquitted at their tribunal, than if he took it in none. This belief and this opinion do not hang very well together in reason, but they may do so in religious policy. To keep up a belief of particular providences, serves to keep up a belief, not only of the efficacy of prayer, and of the intercession of saints in heaven, as well as of the church on earth, but of the several rites of external devotion: and to keep up a belief that they are few, and that the providence of God, as it is exercised in this world, is therefore on the whole unjust, serves to keep up a belief of another world, wherein all, that is amiss here, shall be set right. The ministry of a clergy is thought necessary on both these accounts by all: and there are few, who see how difficult it is to make the two doctrines, which these reverend persons maintain, appear in any tolerable manner consistent. On the whole, tho there is little credit to be given to all

* Evid. p. 142.

† - - - Non placet autem paucis a diis immortalibus esse consultum; sequitur ergo ut nemini consultum sit.

that lying legends, suspicious traditions, and idle rumors have reported concerning particular acts of providence, wrought on particular occasions, and directed manifestly by an immediate exercise of the divine power to the advantage of some, and to the detriment of others; yet will I not presume to deny, that there have been any such. This I will say only that if any such have been, they must have been such, as might happen sometimes in the ordinary course of a general providence. They could not be such as must have violated the laws of nature in their production. Nothing can be less reconcileable to the notion of an all-perfect Being, than the imagination that he undoes by his power in particular cases what his wisdom, to whom nothing is future, once thought sufficient to be established for all cases. The effects, therefore, that are assumed of particular providences are either false, or they are undistinguishable from those of a general providence, and become particular by nothing more than the application which vain superstition or pious fraud makes of them. It is as easy to attack, and it is as easy to defend the justice of God on one hypothesis, as on the other. But since one is supported by equivocal and doubtful, and the other by unquestionable facts, I shall borrow no help from the former, I shall suppose them not to have been, and shall rest the cause of God on the latter, which are likewise the most proper to be urged against the atheists.

LVI.

LET us consider how it appears, by the objections these difficult persons make, that we, and the system we inhabit, should have been framed to satisfy them, and to anticipate their cavils; after which it will be proper to consider further, how it is framed, and to compare God's plan with theirs. Physical nature then should have been so constituted, that the whole world might have been one paradise, neither scorched by the sun, nor pinched by the cold, nor ruffled by tempests. Men should have enjoyed in it every natural good, and have been subject to no natural evil, no not to death, which they deem to be the greatest of evils. Moral nature should have been so constituted, that every man might be necessarily determined to all the obligations of morality, that he might be good, as PATERCULUS says of CATO*, because he could not be otherwise. He should have been impeccable, as well as invulnerable. No matter how all this would have unconnected the universe, and have broke the harmony, and the consent of it's parts, in which we see that the planets of our solar system act on one another, that the sun acts on all of them, and that, for ought we can tell, the several solar systems that compose the universe act on one another likewise. No matter how all this would have accorded with

* Quia aliter esse non potuit.

a gradation of sense and intellect; how senses less imperfect would have broke that proportion between them and their objects which is necessary to make them useful in human life; how superior faculties of the mind would have broke that scale of intelligence which rises up to man in this animal system; which may rise up from him, in other systems, in an higher proportion, and which one of these allies, the divine, allows to do so in other created beings. No matter for such considerations as these. Instead of concluding from the want of all these advantages, which they esteem to be due to them, that man is not so noble a creature as they have represented him to themselves, they conclude that because he wants them God is unjust. Just so they concluded from their indeterminable notions of divine goodness, and of divine love, that the world was made for man, and man not to be moderately but immoderately happy in it; instead of concluding the very contrary from their determinate idea of wisdom, which has not proportioned any means to these ends, in making the world and man.

BUT the dogmatical persons who assume so much, and prove commonly so little, do not only proceed on groundless principles; they shift and vary their principles of reasoning as different occasions require; which is a practice much used, avowed, and approved by antient fathers, and which makes it rather tedious, than hard, very often to refute their successors. In the present ar-

gument for instance, many of their complaints and objections are levelled at the whole scheme and order of things both physical and moral. They mean nothing, or they mean that the whole should have been differently constituted, and in the manner I have hinted, to have been reconcileable to the goodness and justice of God. But they grow less severe in their criticisms, and less exorbitant in their demands at other times, and seem to think that the divine attributes might have been saved even in the present constitution of physical and moral nature, if by continual interpositions of providence every good man had been protected from evils of both kinds, whilst every ill man was exposed to them all; if the office of the angels standing before the throne of God*, and ministring to the favorites of God, that is, to the elect, had been more extended and more regularly performed. This may be looked upon as a sort of composition into which they are driven by the extravagance of the other hypothesis, and by the absurd consequences that flow from it.

If the divine attributes had required that there should have been no such thing as physical or moral evil, man would have been visibly the final cause of a world made solely for his use, and to be the scene of his happiness. This world would have been visibly the final cause of the universe. All the planets would have rolled in subserviency to ours, and the fixed stars themselves would have

* Vid. Dan. c. vii.

served to no other purpose than to twinkle by night, to adorn our canopy, and to please our eyes. But this hypothesis appearing too extravagant to be insisted upon in it's whole extent, one part of it has been laid aside, and one retained. No one will affirm in terms, I think, at this time, that our world is the final cause of the universe. But many will affirm that man is by the goodness of God the final cause of the world he inhabits; and, therefore, if physical evil is inseparable from physical nature, and moral evil from moral nature, by the necessary relations of things, or by the general scheme which infinite wisdom has established, the consistency of the divine attributes required that something more, than we observe, should have been done to make the first design of God in the creation of this world and of man effectual. His goodness required at least that the general state of mankind should not be as miserable, as it is, in a world made for the sake of mankind. His justice required most certainly, that they who seek the perfection of their nature, and the happiness of their kind in virtue, should be distinguished from those who deprave their own nature, pervert the order of things, and hinder virtue from having it's due effect. What could not be effected by a general providence, acting by general laws, might have been effected by particular providences acting on every occasion according to the merit or demerit of every rational creature. But this has not been done, and such providences are so rare, that there is far less virtue

than vice to be found, and that the former is, for the most part, unhappy, and the latter prosperous in this world. The justice of God is, therefore, justly condemned, unless there is another. Let us make a few reflections, that will shew how ill this charge is laid, and how ill, if it was better laid, the expedient of another life would serve to set right the pretended irregularities of this world, and to justify the providence of God.

LVII.

TO suppose a constant series of particular interpositions from above necessary to this purpose, seems to my apprehension little less absurd, than to suppose the necessity of a perpetual and universal theocracy: and to complain that such a government of the world has not been established, is as silly, as it would be to complain that the golden age of the poets is ended, or that the millenary year of the Apocalypse is not begun. If all men had been determined necessarily to virtue, there would have been certainly no moral evil, nor probably any more physical, than there was in paradise, or than there will be in the new Jerusalem. But there would have been no merit neither, nor, properly speaking, any such thing as virtue. Our moral obligations arise from that nature, which God willed we should have. They must continue as long as this nature exists, that is, as long as there are men; and so long whatever promotes the happiness of the kind will be
virtue

virtue at least in one sense, and whatever tends to the destruction of it will be vice in every sense. Vice and virtue must take their denominations not only from their effects, but from their motives. Actions of the first sort must have always a bad motive as well as a bad effect, and must therefore be always attended with demerit. But actions of the second or mere innocence may have no moral motive at all, nor consequently any true merit, as in the case of an absolute and natural determination; or they may have motives, which render them rather appearances of virtue than really virtuous, and deprive them in a strict sense of all merit, as in the case of particular and occasional determinations of the will wrought by immediate interpositions of the divine power, whether acting silently within, or sensibly without. Our inconsistent academician confesses thus much in the very breath, in which he affirms that mankind should have been determined, some way or other, by the gods to virtue. Nay, he asserts even more than is true; for tho we owe the practice of virtue to ourselves, to our own elections, and to our own free-will, in which all the merit we can have consists, yet we owe to God the means of knowing, and of practising it *.

* *Virtutem nemo unquam acceptam deo retulit. Nimirum recte. Propter virtutem enim jure laudamur, et in virtute recte gloriamur. quod non contingeret, si id donum a deo, non a nobis haberemus.*

. . . . Debebant illi quidem omnes bonos efficere siquidem hominum generi consulebant. Sin id minus, bonis quidem certe consulere debebant.

IF all men had been originally and necessarily determined, by the constitution of their nature, to virtue, according to COTTA's first proposition, and had, therefore, been able to acquire no more merit in doing virtuous actions, than they acquire in drinking when they are thirsty, or in gratifying any natural appetite, what a curious system might some philosopher of the school of POTAMO have made by joining the gods of EPICURUS to the men of COTTA? Slim, taper, transparent beings in heaven, indolent and unactive†: a succession of machines on earth, wound up to go a certain time, to continue certain motions, and to strike at certain moments, according to their predestination, or the pre-established harmony of their system. But, in good earnest, is a system of particular providences, in which the Supreme Being, or the angels, like his ministers to reward, and his executioners to punish, are constantly employed in the affairs of mankind, much more reasonable? Would the justice of God be more manifest in such a state of things, than in the present? I see no room for merit on the part of man, nor for justice on the part of God, in such a state: and a state of partial, not universal, determinations to goodness, instead of being liable to such cavils as we have now under consideration, would be liable to unanswerable objections. It would be productive of effects, quite opposite to those that are assumed,

† Exiles perlucidos monogrammos deos, et nihil agentes.

and would cause the wildest confusion in the judgments of mankind.

IF some men were determined to goodness by the silent workings of the Spirit, and others not, which they must be on the supposition of particular providences, and a partial not universal determination ; if the former were protected from evils of every kind, on account of this goodness, and if the latter were exposed, for want of it, to all those physical evils which result from the constitution of the material world, as well as to all those moral evils which such men would bring on one another, what could be said to excuse the justice of God ? Plainly nothing. The proceeding would be that of injustice, and an arbitrary partiality, which can never be imputed, even indirectly, to him without blasphemy. It is not possible for me to conceive that any thing out of himself could be a motive to the first intelligent cause of all things to create any thing, neither can I subscribe to the opinion, that certain general independent natures tempted God, as it were, to cloath them with existence. I can conceive still less, that individual creatures, before they have done either good or evil, nay, before their actual existence, can be objects of predilection or aversion, of love or hatred, to God : and yet this must have been, to have made such a system of particular providences effectual in the first instance of it. If we can conceive it made so in this, we may conceive it made so in all the rest : and if God had pre-determined some men to goodness

ness exclusively of others, without any motive on his side, we may easily conceive that particular providences would have been employed to secure happiness to them, without any merit on theirs. But “*credat Judaeus Apella, Non ego.*” CLARKE shall not force me into atheism, tho I deny what he asserts concerning the moral attributes of God; nor WOLLASTON, tho I see, not only one, but many good men unhappy, and am not convinced by his reasonings of a future state.

I MAY be stopped here, perhaps, and may be asked with a tone of authority, “Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” If I am so stopped, and so questioned, my answer is both ready and sufficient. “Holy, or reverend sir, I am a better theist than you, and on this occasion I reason better. It is not I that reply against God. It is you. Had such a system, as this, been actually established by God, he would have spoke by his works, and I should, for this very reason, have believed it agreeable to the divine attributes, tho I could not have reconciled it to my notions of impartiality, and justice, nor even of wisdom. But since I cannot reconcile it to them, and since I have no assurance but your word, against all appearances, that God elects some men, and rejects or neglects others, that he softeneth the hearts of some, and hardeneth the hearts of others, I should reply against God, indeed, if I admitted what you assert to be true. I reason cautiously from what he has done, to his attributes.”

“ attributes. You affirm boldly, without any regard to what he has done, or to the perfections of an all-perfect Being.”

As to the other part of the hypothesis, which supposes particular providences, that might protect the good and secure their happiness, wanting, and therefore God convicted of injustice in the present constitution of things; it is maintained, I think, by the whole chorus of divines: and they, who do not hold the doctrine I have mentioned, are as loud in their complaints as they who do. They who agree in little else agree in censuring the dispensations of providence: and if some are dissatisfied with the lot of their elect, others are so as much with that of good men in general, however they came to be good. To satisfy them all, therefore, and to shew himself a just governor of the world, instead of governing by the established laws of nature and by a general providence, he should have corrected these laws and have governed by particular providences, whenever the service of good men required it. If he had not made all men good, he should have made all good men happy. Now suppose it done, suppose this human reformation of divine economy, what would be the consequences? Would they not be such as these?

If the good, besides the enjoyment of all that happiness which is inseparable from virtue, were exempted from all kinds of evil, and if the wicked, besides those evils, which are inseparable from vice,
and

and those which happen to all men in the ordinary course of events, were exposed to others that the hand of God inflicted on them in an extraordinary manner; in short if an ark was ready, at every inundation, to save the former, and if a destroying angel was ready on every occasion to wreak vengeance on the latter, it is certain, as we have observed already, that such good men would have very little merit; and it may be suspected that the hearts of the wicked would be hardened as that of PHARAOH was by all the plagues that God brought on him and his people. Such good men would have, whilst they continued to be good, no other merit than that of children who are cajoled into their duty; or than that of galley-slaves who ply at the oar because they hear, and see, and fear the lash of the boatswain.

BUT would there not be, at the same time, some further defects in this scheme? I think there would. It seems to me that these good men, being thus distinguished, by particular providences in their favor, from the rest of mankind, might be apt either not to contract, or to lose, that general benevolence which is a fundamental principle of the law of nature, and that public spirit which is the life and soul of society. God has made the practice of morality our interest, as well as our duty. But men, who found themselves constantly protected from the evils that fell on others, might grow insensibly to think themselves unconcerned in the common fate: and if they relaxed in their zeal for the public

lic good, they would relax in their virtue; for public good is the object of virtue. They might do worse. Spiritual pride might infect them. They might become, in their own imaginations, the little flock, or the chosen sheep. Others have become so by the mere force of enthusiasm, without any such inducements as those which we assume in this case, and experience has shewn that there are no wolves like these sheep. Thus forced into virtue, and rewarded for being virtuous, they might cease to deserve the reward in any sense or degree. On the whole; the scheme, opposed to God's scheme, is inconsistent with all our notions of wisdom, as well as of justice. It is the scheme of men: it must be tried, therefore, by human ideas and notions; and since the justice of providence is attacked on these, it may be defended, surely, on the same. To measure the wisdom and justice of God by a rule so inadequate as that of human intelligence, is vanity and presumption in the highest degree. But to expose this vanity and presumption, by shewing the men who are guilty of them that even their own rule is sufficient to condemn them, is very consistent with the modesty of true theism.

I WILL conclude this head by observing that we have example, as well as reason, for us when we reject the hypothesis of particular providences. If the government of a general providence was liable to the objections that are made to it, a government by particular providences would be liable to none. But the contrary appears true from the example

example of the jewish theocracy. God was the king of that people. He did not decline the title, nor the exercise of kingly power, as his son, who came to suffer for all mankind, and not to govern a most inconsiderable portion of them, did afterwards. His presence resided among this people, and his justice was manifested daily in rewarding and punishing by unequivocal, signal, miraculous interpositions of his power. The effect of all was this, the people rebelled at one time, and repented at another. Particular providences, directed by God himself immediately, and on the spot, if I may say so, had particular temporary effects only, none general nor lasting: and the people were so little satisfied with this system of government, that they deposed the Supreme Being, and insisted to have another king, and to be governed like their neighbours. How long this theocracy may be said to have continued, I am quite unconcerned to know, and should be sorry to mis-spence any time in enquiring. It is enough for my purpose to have observed that the justice of God was not so acknowledged, as to produce any suitable effects, at a point of time when the Israelites had no other king but God; and to conclude from thence that, if he governed the whole world at present by particular providences, they would not have a better effect in manifesting his justice, nor stop the clamor against it, of the very men, perhaps, who accuse now the injustice of his general providence. Nay, the case would be much worse, and every particular exertion of his power would

would render his justice more disputable: so pregnant is this scheme with absurdities.

It has been said already, that where religions, which claim to have been revealed, prevail, a new character of goodness arises, besides that which consists in obedience to the laws of nature, and compliance with our moral obligations. Faith in certain men, and, on their authority, in certain facts, and certain speculative propositions, how incredible soever the former, how little intelligible soever the latter may be, together with the practice of certain duties which the arbitrary will of man imposes, and the observation of certain forms of outward devotion, constitute this artificial goodness, which stands often in the place of natural, and is always attended to much more.

THIS is that kind of goodness which christian divines intend principally or solely when they complain that good men are often unhappy, and bad men happy, by the present constitution of things. They establish a rule, and are not agreed about the application of it: for who are to be reputed good Christians? Go to Rome, they are Papists. Go to Geneva, they are Calvinists. Go to the north of Germany, they are Lutherans. Come to London, they are none of these. Orthodoxy is a mode. It is one thing at one time and in one place. It is something else at another time and in another place, or even in the same place: for in this religious country of ours, without seek-

ing proofs in any other, men have been burned under one reign, for the very same doctrines they were obliged to profess in another. You damn all those who differ from you. We doubt much about your salvation. In what manner, now, can the justice of God be manifested by particular providences? Must the order of them change as the notions of orthodoxy change, and must they be governed by events, instead of governing them? If they are favorable to those of your communion, they will be deemed unjust by every good Protestant, and God will be taxed with encouraging idolatry and superstition. If they are favorable to those of any of our communions, they will be deemed unjust by every good Papist, and God will be taxed with nursing up heresy and schism. God can do nothing more, than to furnish arms against himself, by the dispensations of particular providences in the christian world; and every one of these will pass, in the minds of some men, for a proof of injustice, if it passes in the minds of others for a proof of justice. Nay, more. If, in these dispensations, God, who knows the hearts of men, should judge differently from our divines, if he should shew more regard to moral goodness, than to the reputed orthodoxy of any side, it would fare with him, I say it with reverence, as it fares with every honest man in civil contests; he would be calumniated by all sides in the exercise of particular providences, as he is in that of a general providence.

LVIII.

HAVING said thus much to shew the absurdity of assuming that a system of particular providences is necessary to render the government of God, in the present constitution of the physical and moral world, a just government; as it must indeed be necessary, if the government of a general providence, according to the established order of things, is unjust; it seems to me that they who object to this are driven to the greatest of all absurdities. They must either give up their objections, or they must insist that the whole established order of things ought to be changed, and that God cannot govern mankind with justice, unless he undoes all he has done, and asserts this moral attribute at the expence of his wisdom. To say, as CLARKE says, “that the natural order of things is so perverted that virtue and goodness cannot obtain their proper and due effects,” is a mere fallacy. He begs the question: and, begging the question, he affirms untruly. How, and when, was the natural order of things perverted? What is every natural order, but that which the author of nature appoints, and how can it be changed for the better, or for the worse, without a new appointment of his? Are we to believe, then, that he has undone his work once already after the fall of ADAM, and that he must undo it again, to appear either good or just? To think worthily of God, we must think that the natural

order of things has been always the same, and that a Being of infinite wisdom and knowledge, to whom the past and the future are like the present, and who wants no experience to inform him, can have no reason to alter what infinite wisdom and knowledge have once done, as I have hinted above. Again, what are the proper and due effects of virtue and goodness? Nay, what are virtue and goodness themselves? They are not, I believe, independent, nor eternal, but they are real natures, resulting from the system of rational beings to which they are agreeable, as their contraries are repugnant; and they must, therefore, be as invariable as the system of which they are parts. Thus I think; for the opinion of the independency of any natures on God, or of their co-eternity with him, are bugbears to me who am a child in philosophy, tho they are none to such full-grown metaphysical giants as CUDWORTH, CLARKE, and others. Now, if virtue and goodness be as invariable as this system, their effects in it must be as invariable as themselves; and, therefore, to say that they cannot obtain their proper and due effects in it, is nothing better than cant. They may not obtain all the effects which these great doctors in metaphysics and artificial theology esteem proper and due to them; but they may, and they certainly do, obtain all those which he, who willed this system and them into being, designed that they should obtain; for if he had designed that they should have obtained more, he would have proportioned different means to a different

ferent

ferent end, and man would have been a less imperfect creature than he is.

COULD philosophers and divines be persuaded to lay aside the affectation of etching out a little real knowledge with much hypothesis, in matters where hypothesis should be least employed, many things, which are made intricate by this method, would be extremely plain. Thus, for instance, in the present case, let them not assume that there are natures which exist independently on God, according to which he proceeds, or should proceed; and that we may judge, by a rule common to him and us, the eternal reason of things. Let them not assume that the moral attributes are precisely the same in God, as they are in our ideas and notions; that they required man should be the final cause of the world, and his happiness the final cause of man. Instead of reasoning from what, they imagine, these attributes and an eternal reason of things required that God should do, let them be content to know what his infinite wisdom and power have done, and to reason from thence. Let them not assume, in short, what they have no sufficient grounds to assume, and they will accuse the Supreme Being of injustice no longer.

It may be said, and I know it will be said, that we must assume at least thus much, that God acts always according to the moral fitness of things, or we must assume something worse, we must assume that he acts arbitrarily; and that, on this supposition, we

leave ourselves no rule, by which to judge of his proceedings, or to distinguish certainly between a true and a false revelation. Now, I am far from denying that there is an eternal reason. God is himself that reason : and there is no doubt that he proceeds with his creatures in all the exertions of his power, determined by infinite wisdom, according to the fitness of things. But the question is, what are the criterions of this moral fitness relatively to man ? I think, then, that they are to us, and can be only that constitution of things which we call the human system, and the notions which arise naturally in our minds on the consideration of it, or which we are able to deduce immediately, and obviously, from it. When we keep within these bounds, we are in no danger of being imposed upon concerning the will of God, or by any false revelation. But when we go beyond them, we are apt to impose on ourselves ; for, to return some of CLARKE's words upon him, tho there is a natural and unalterable difference between good and evil ; yet nothing but the extremest stupidity of mind, or perverseness of spirit, and disregard to truth, can possibly make any man affirm, like him, that moral fitnesses and unfitnesses are, even in their applications to our scene of action (and they will be infinitely less so in their applications to that of God) as manifest as mathematical truths. We may discover moral fitness as we discover natural law : but then we must be on our guard lest we should pervert our notions of moral fitness and unfitness by wrong applications

tions

tions of them out of our system, as we pervert the principles of natural law by wrong applications of them within it. To suppose, in terms, that the laws of human are the law of divine nature, would be too absurd, tho some writers have done no less. But it is just as absurd, nay, it is just the same, to suppose that the moral fitness and unfitness of things must be in every instance, whatever it may be in some, exactly the same to God as it is to man. He made our system for us, not for himself; and tho we are sure he cannot exact that we should believe or practise any thing repugnant to the moral fitness resulting from it, we must not imagine that, by abstracting our notions from it, we can render them adequate to that moral fitness which is the object of omniscience, the omniscience of that Supreme Being who is the author of this, and every other system.

THE men who attempt to do this leave to God nothing more than they assume to themselves, except a greater degree of power: and even this they assume to be limited of right by natures as eternal, and as independent as his own, tho executed, in fact, repugnantly to these natures. What these natures are, they know as well as he; for they soar up on platonic wings to the first good and the first just. What his attributes must be to be conformable to these natures, and what they require of him consequently, these persons illuminated by an eternal reason cannot, therefore, fail to know: and they seem to exalt them as if they meant only by exalting them to

aggravate the want of goodness and justice in the conduct of providence. Let not this pass for any exaggeration. It is, in plain terms, the sum of a doctrine they teach in the cant of metaphysical theology, to which they have accustomed the ears of men, and by which they impose on their understandings. I desire no better proof of what is here advanced, than the twelfth section of CLARKE'S Demonstration, and the first of his Evidences. The subject has been often touched in these essays, and even in some of the last paragraphs; but it may be proper, however, to examine this famous argumentation a priori a little more particularly. It is plausible, for it speaks to the pride of the human heart, and submits the whole economy of divine wisdom to the judgment of man. But I apprehend that it supposes some things very doubtful, and affirms others that imply contradiction. I will enter into it, therefore, in this place, further than I have done, and slide or leap from subject to subject, or revert to the same a second, and a third time, in these ill-connected minutes, as I used to do in the conversations they are designed to recal.

THAT there is a fitness and unfitness of things to one another, a suitableness and unsuitableness of circumstances to persons, no reasonable man will deny. But I suspect that many reasonable men will doubt, whether they are founded in natures and qualifications independently on God, and antecedently to his will. They will find it difficult

cult to conceive how fitnesses, resulting from the natures of things, or from the qualifications of persons, can be called antecedent to these things, and to these persons: and yet they must be so, if they are antecedent to that will, by the act of which these things and these persons first existed. It is said *, that the existence of things, and the argument requires that the same should be said of persons, depends on the arbitrary will of God. But that when they are created, and as long as they exist, their proportions, respects, and relations, are abstractly of eternal necessity, according to the different natures of things, and the different qualifications of persons, in one common nature. This I take to be the sense and strength of the argument, which will not appear in my apprehension very intelligible, nor, as far as it is intelligible, very conclusive.

WE consider one thing, or one property, one person, or one qualification, without considering another; and by that we make a very real, and, I presume, the sole kind of abstraction our minds are capable of making. But to consider the properties of things, or the qualifications of persons, and the fitnesses and unfitnesses resulting from them, as independent natures existing before there were any such things, or any such persons, any such natures, qualifications, circumstances, seems to me a fictitious abstraction doubly. It assumes that we have ideas which we have not, and that

* Evid. p. 87.

the modes of being, by which things and persons are what they are, may be conceived as adventitious to them, instead of being conceived as so constitutive of them that they could not be without the things, and persons, nor these without them. By assuming one of these imaginary abstractions, men are led to assume the other, and their mistake about the operations of nature is connected with that about the operations of their own minds.

THE modes of being, and the properties of things are inseparable from them, even in imagination; which might be an argument the more to persuade that they are the same specific natures, and that his will, which constituted these natures, constituted, at the same time, all that is essential to them. But tho we cannot separate in this manner, we can take the properties of things, both physical and moral, into distinct consideration. This philosophers have done with honor to themselves, and advantage to others. But when they have been long accustomed to such abstract considerations, and have established certain mathematical and moral truths upon them, some of these philosophers assume, that these general notions are natures independent on God, and in themselves of eternal necessity. God has made triangles and men. But triangularity, they say, and, they might say just as well, humanity are independent natures, antecedent to his will, and that do not owe their original to arbitrary and positive appointment.

appointment. That there are necessary truths, mathematical and moral, and that such they must be, as long as there are men, and as the present system of things continues, is certain. But they would not be called, perhaps, eternal truths, nor would these notions be represented like eternal and independent natures, if it was more considered that the self-existent Being is the fountain of all existence, and that, since every thing exists by his will, it must exist according to his will; for which reason it seems as absurd to say that, when he made man, he could give him no other nature than the human, which was therefore necessarily, not arbitrarily given, as it would be to say that, when he made a man, he did not make a tree. A man with the properties of a tree would not be a man. A tree with the properties of a man would not be a tree. The same will which made each made the properties of each. It is one and the same act; and to say that the nature of any thing, or the truths resulting from it, are independent, in any sense, on the will that made them, seems to me, therefore, to imply contradiction.

CLARKE quotes a passage from PLATO, wherein that philosopher says, according to his translation, that “as in matters of sense the reason, why a
 “thing is visible, is not because it is seen, but it
 “is, therefore, seen because it is visible: so in
 “matters of natural reason and morality, that
 “which is holy and good, is not therefore holy
 “and good because it is commanded to be done,
 “but

“but it is therefore commanded by God because it is holy and good.” If I would cavil a little, I might shew that this quotation does not serve the doctor’s purpose, nor prove that PLATO was of his mind in asserting that moral obligations are, primarily and originally, antecedent to the will of God, if by will be meant his determination that they should be obligatory, when he made a moral world: and if by will be meant a positive command, signified by revelation, the quotation from PLATO, who knew nothing of any such revelation, is strangely absurd. Things may be seen because they are visible, they are not visible because they are seen. Let it be so. Does this prove that the philosopher thought visibility, any more than vision, an eternal independent nature? Might he not think that God made things to be seen, and creatures to see, and that visibility and vision began when he willed the physical system into existence? Thus, again, that which is good, is not such because it is commanded, but it is commanded because it is good. Will it follow from this expression, that good is, according to PLATO, an eternal independent nature? Will it not follow as naturally, that good and evil began when God willed the moral system into existence, and that he commanded the former by the laws of their nature, at the same time when he created moral agents capable of either? This remark may serve, at least, to shew how apt even the best writers are to amuse themselves, and to impose on others by a mere gingle of words, and to

to quote what makes against them, or does not make for them.

BUT now, having made this remark, I am ready to acknowledge that PLATO meant by this passage in his Euthyphro the first good, that independent nature which resides among others in his imaginary region of eternal ideas. This should be his meaning, whatever his words in this place import, to make them consistent with his doctrine, and apposite to the present dispute, wherein PLATO and the Platonists run into one extreme, as HOBBS and the Hobbists into another. The former assume an eternal morality antecedent not only to any signification, but to any actual determination of the will of God. The latter assume, that there was no moral duty, no difference, no distinction made between just and unjust, moral good and evil, till the will of man made this distinction by civil constitutions, and positive laws. It seems to me, that both these opinions tend to weaken the authority of natural religion. By the first, God published, indeed, a moral law, when he made moral agents. But he was not properly the legislator. The law existed before them, and it binds both him and them. By the second, he has not so much as the appearance of legislature. He made a moral world, indeed, but he made it in confusion, and he left it without any rule, till at last his creatures made one for themselves. He brought order out of the confusion of a physical, they out of that of a moral chaos. How preferable

able is the middle opinion between these two extremes, that God instituted moral obligations when he made moral agents, that the law of their nature is the law of his will, and that, how indifferent soever we may presume every thing is to him before his will has determined it to be, it becomes, after this determination, a necessary, tho created, nature? Such justice is in man, tho in God it may be nothing more than one mode of his infinite wisdom. As long as there are men, this nature must exist. Where it will be, and what it will be, when they and this moral system are at an end, let those able persons, who know so well where and what it was before they both began to exist, determine. If I insist much on this point, I do not pretend to clear it from all the difficulties that lye in the way, neither by what is said here, nor by what has been said elsewhere, nor by what I may say hereafter. There are many on either side, that have perplexed, and may continue to perplex, much better heads than mine. But, in the first place, I feel an insuperable repugnancy to own that any thing is independent on God; and, in the next place, I am shocked at the consequences that are drawn from this doctrine.

LIX.

HE who dares to affirm that there are eternal self-existent natures independent on God, is bold enough. But what shall we say to those who dare

dare to affirm that these eternal natures, resulting from the eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses, agreements and disagreements, proportions and disproportions of things, are absolutely and necessarily in themselves what they appear to be to the understandings of all intelligent beings? I do not add the exception, except those who understand things to be what they are not, because it is unnecessary to any other purpose than that of an evasion, which CLARKE, like a cunning disputant, foresaw he might want, and did want. What shall we say of those who think it necessary to bring proofs to shew that God must know what his rational creatures may know concerning these eternal natures independent on him, and who conclude from thence, that the rule of divine and human conduct is the same? God disdains not to observe this rule, it is said, as the law of his actions, and he appeals to men for his observation of it: which matter of fact is asserted on the authority of a chapter in EZECHIEL *, where the prophet, like a prophet and a poet, introduces God expostulating with the Jews in this style, and appealing to them for the equity of his proceedings. Bishop CUMBERLAND, who is quoted by CLARKE †, carries these notions still further, when he maintains in his seventh chapter ‡, with much obscure subtilty, not only that the rules of this law are the dictates of divine intelligence to God himself, but that the dominion of God over all his creatures is a right

* Chap. xviii.

† Evid. p. 83.

‡ De leg. naturae.

derived

derived from these very rules, and from his wisdom which prescribes them to him. I shall not enter on a discussion, which is not immediately necessary to the present purpose. I shall only say, that the wisdom, as well as the power of God in the creation, preservation, and government of all things is, without doubt, a true and joint foundation of his dominion over them; and that there seems to be no need of excluding one of the two, God's irresistible power, in order to obviate the consequences which the good bishop suspected that HOBBS intended. Let us keep out of these mists, and pursue our subject in a clearer light.

I ask then, if nothing less than infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, and absolute independency be necessary to make it impossible that the Supreme Being should be ignorant in any respect of the eternal natures, on which the eternal reason of things is founded, how can it be said with the least appearance of truth that these assumed natures appear just such, as they are absolutely and necessarily in themselves, to the understandings of all intelligent beings, and become constantly the rule of their actions? Have we then infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, and absolute independency? The human mind apprehends clearly enough the gross differences of things in the moral system, as human sense does in the physical. But in the former, as in the latter, the nicer differences are not so perceptible. We have not any knowledge of the first qualities of substances. It is enough for us to have some knowledge

knowledge, of the second, of those which affect us immediately. It is in vain that we attempt to go higher in search of scientific knowledge: and even about these we are very liable to mistakes. Much in the same manner we know something of moral entities, allow me the use of this metaphysical word for once, as they arise in our moral system; and are able to affirm many general truths concerning them. But it is in vain that we attempt to go higher in our search, or to know any thing more about them than God has shewn us in the actual constitution of things: and even when we judge of them thus, and make particular applications of the general laws of our nature, we are very liable to mistakes. We are not liable to these mistakes in such cases only as are very far from occurring frequently, which CLARKE affirms; but we are liable to them in such as occur the most frequently, whether they relate to public or to private life. The contrary laws that legislators have made, the contrary opinions that casuists daily give in matters of morality, wherein some of them must have been mistaken, are evident proofs of this.

THAT there are things fit and unfit, right and wrong, just and unjust, in the human system, and discernible by human reason, as far as our natural imperfections admit, I acknowledge most readily. But from the difficulty we have to judge, and from the uncertainty of our judgments in a multitude of cases which lie within our bounds, I would demon-

strate the folly of those who affect to have knowledge beyond them. They pretend dogmatically to deduce from abstract eternal natures what these natures require of God, whilst they are at the same time unable on many occasions to deduce from the constitution of their own system, and the laws of their own nature, with precision and certainty, what these require of them, and what is right or wrong, just or unjust, for them to do. CLARKE employs an allusion to evade this objection, which would be extremely pretty, if it did not make directly against him in the present application of it, and the only application that can make it pertinent. There is justice, and injustice, as certainly as there is white and black *. But as the painter can, by diluting the two colors, not make them terminate in the midst insensibly, for these words are mere expletives and mean nothing; but as he can make them run into one another till no eye can distinguish them; so the casuist in law or divinity dilutes right and wrong, just and unjust, till no mind, not even his own, can unblend and distinguish them again. If white and black were colors as immutable as they are obvious to human sight, and if justice and injustice were abstract natures immutably obvious to the human understanding, this could not be. But neither are the colors immutable, nor the natures so fixed and so obvious as to be always discerned, and in every light alike. This is what I say, and what the doctor would, if he could, deny. His learned men, his men who understand things to be what they are, not what

* Evid. p. 45.

they are not, blunder about, and contradict one another in matters that are certainly objects of human reason, tho they presume to say that they are guided in their judgments, and directed in their conduct, by the eternal reason of things, by a rule that is common to God and them. I will quote the doctor against himself, on this occasion. I might do so, perhaps, on others. If LYCURGUS had made a law to authorise every man to rob, by violence and murder, whomsoever he met with, such a law could not have been justified. But the law which permitted the spartan youth to steal, as absurd as it was, may bear much dispute, whether it was absolutely unjust or no. Such an opinion delivered by one who did not reckon himself certainly among those who understand things to be what they are not, may authorise, or excuse at least, many that have come out of the school of LOYOLA: and, therefore, I think it proper to recall another spartan institution in this place. The helotes or slaves were made drunk in order to create an aversion to drunkenness in the youth by such ridiculous spectacles. Far be it from me, and from every lover of truth, and of common sense, to wish that the race of metaphysicians and casuists should encrease, or so much as continue: but since there are, have been, and will be, such men in all ages, it is very reasonable to wish that they may serve to the same good purpose that the helotes did at Sparta, and that their delirium, instead of imposing on others, and even infecting many, may be at length laughed out of the world.

It may seem strange to the cool reflections of common sense, that any men, who have the use of their reason, and those especially who would be thought to have cultivated and improved it most, should attempt to persuade us that complex notions of the moral kind, for I meddle with no other, and such as we call mixed modes, are eternal natures and independent on God, when these persons must or may know intuitively that they are dependent on man. I have said already, and I must repeat here, that the mind frames them as it has occasion for them, gives to each a name, and keeps them in store as artificial instruments of the understanding. They exist variously in various minds, nay sometimes in the same mind; but when they exist in no mind, these eternal immutable natures exist no where. Yet such as they are, we are to believe them founded in the eternal fitnesses of things; we are to believe the moral attributes of God founded in them, we are to deduce from them, and from these attributes, what God is under a moral necessity of doing, and what it is his will that men should do; nay we are to prove in a circle that there is a God, because there are such natures *, and that there are such natures because there is a God. These are opinions which common sense will be hardly induced to adopt, and yet metaphysical and artificial theology teach them. As proud as we are of our rationality, certain it is that reason, unmixed, uninfluenced, has less to do than we imagine in fram-

* Vid. CUDWORTH of eter. moral.

ing the opinions, and directing the judgments, of men.

LET us change the image, and observe that it happens to reason, as it happens to instruments ill tuned. The strings are left sometimes too lax, and are sometimes wound up too high. In one case, they give no sound at all, or one that is lifeless and heavy. In the other, the noise they make is great, it fills the ear, but it carries no true harmony to the soul. By the first we may allude to reason weak and unimproved: by the second to reason strained into all the abstractions of metaphysics; and we may discern good sense between these extremes, that is, reason at it's proper tone.

THERE is no subject, on which it is more important that reason should be kept strictly to this tone, than that of the first philosophy; and there is no subject on which it is so liable to be let down below it, or wound up above it. I am not to speak here of the first, of that insensibility and stupidity wherein a great part of mankind is immerfed; but of that activity of the mind which raises some of them so far above it. Now among these, they who apply themselves to the first philosophy, apply themselves to the noblest objects that can demand the attention of their mind, to the existence of an all-perfect Being, to the infinite wisdom and power that are manifested in his works, and to the significations of his will concerning the duties we owe to him, and to one another. From these

different objects arise two kinds of philosophy, divine philosophy or theology, moral philosophy or ethics. Like different branches of the same tree, they spring from the same root, and that root is the actual system of things. As high as they can be trained up from hence, they bear the genuine fruit of knowledge. But when fantastical gardeners bend the tops of the highest sprigs, like the ficus indica, down to earth; if they take root, they bear it of a bastard kind, and serve only to plant a labyrinth wherein the gardeners themselves are lost. Such fantastical gardeners our metaphysicians are. When they have acquired ideas from the actual system of things, and have carried their knowledge up from the creation to that self-existent, intelligent Being, the Creator, they disdain to reason any longer a posteriori. They frame an hypothesis, with much agitation of their minds, out of the ideas and notions they have acquired in this manner, and reason from it without any further regard to the phaenomena. This method of philosophising has produced often nothing more than impudent assertions. Such was the theology of the Epicureans, if that may be called so: and that of the Stoics too, as much as they opposed the former, and as good theists as they were esteemed on this account, was little better.

LX.

WHILST the folly lasted among the antient philosophers of making universal systems, and
of

of explaining the whole scheme, order, and state of things, he who had not given a great part of his system to theology would have gained little reputation. This PLATO saw, and he put theology into every thing he taught. I can easily imagine that the same progress was made in composing these spiritual romances, that we see has been made in composing those of a different kind. Amadis of Gaul, and many more, which the niece, the curate, and the barber threw out of Don QUIXOTE's windows, and burned in his yard, were writ without any regard to probability, and no man could read them with any attention, nor suffer his imagination to wander long so extravagantly, who was not as mad as the knight of La Mancha. After these writers, LA CALPRENADE arose, like another PLATO, and by mixing fiction ingeniously with the truth of history, he composed romances capable of amusing, and even almost of deceiving. But, however this may have been, all our metaphysical writers have rather copied, than improved, the platonic systems; so that if the founder of the academy meant to distinguish himself by his theology, he has succeeded beyond any hopes he could conceive. It prevailed in the heathen world, and it has prevailed much more in the christian church. Particular men among the heathen embraced it for the same reason that he had to teach it, to distinguish themselves, and to acquire a name in philosophy: or else they were determined to it, like PLOTINUS and PORPHYRY,

by an enthusiastic turn of mind, which all the religions of those ages and countries were very proper to give, and this theology to confirm. But as soon as an entire order of men was set apart in the christian church, to instruct the world in all matters of a divine or moral nature, and to teach a revelation little different in many instances from platonism, this philosophy acquired a new strength, and more motives concurred to maintain it than there had been to establish it. The opinions of PLATO were employed to illustrate the mysteries of the gospel, and even to recommend them to the belief of such apologists as JUSTIN, and of such doctors as AUSTIN. No wonder, therefore, that, being consecrated in this manner, they have been propagated with christianity in every instance where they are not directly repugnant to it. No wonder that, theology becoming one of the sciences in *lucrum exeuntes*, that is a trade, the professors of it have kept up that marvellous, which is the mystery of the trade, and to which nothing could contribute more than the metaphysics of PLATO. No wonder that the doctrine, which we speak of here, should still subsist, tho it does not seem agreeable to the simplicity of true theism, nor of service to morality, which would not be the duty of every man if the principles of it could be understood by none but metaphysicians, nor the obligations of it be well explained without an intricate deduction of arguments *a priori*.

THIS

THIS the trade, and nothing but the trade, makes necessary: and, tho we are told that proofs a posteriori are no more than secondary considerations, I must confess, what I have often felt, that if I had not been convinced of all the great articles of natural religion by my own reflections on the infinite wisdom and power displayed in the universe (no part whereof, and therefore not the whole, could be conceived to be self-existent, even if it were conceived to be eternal) on the constitution of my own nature, and on that of the system to which I belong, I should not have been so by all the fine-spun argumentations a priori. The proofs that result immediately from such reflections as these are founded in my sensitive and intuitive knowledge; and to resist them I must renounce my clearest and most distinct ideas. I must do little less, I must accept a flow of mere words, thrown into the form of a demonstration, for demonstration; or I must take inadequate, incomplete, and obscure ideas and notions for such as are adequate, complete, and clear, if I admit many of the proofs brought by some of our most famous writers. They present us with dim spectacles to see what we see clearly without any, and by the natural strength of our eyes; or else to see what is not by nature, nor can be made by art, visible to our internal sight. They prove as much as needs to be proved, and, therefore, as much as we are able to prove, in order to refute atheism, and to establish theism. But then they mingle this real, and connect it with so much fantastical knowledge, that they

they disgrace and weaken, as much as it is in their power, the former by the latter. It was this very practice which hindered the Stoics from beating the Epicureans out of the field of controversy, and from imposing silence on those babblers, the Academicians. I apprehend that our divines have brought the same disadvantage on themselves in their disputes with atheists, to whom they would be much more formidable, if they neither pursued the practice spoken of here, nor made that occasional alliance with them against the dispensations of providence, which is spoken of above.

To make this conduct appear the less strange, and to take off our wonder at it, we must not only consider that the religious society is composed of as arrant men as the civil, seduced by the same affections, transported by the same passions; and that our divines have at least as much the ostentation of knowledge superior to that of other men, as those antient philosophers had, who pretended that philosophy was the science of all things divine and human, or the schoolmen who were ready to dispute de omni scibili; but we must consider further, that they assume a right which the antient philosophers did not claim, tho PYTHAGORAS seems to have intended it, a right to instruct mankind in natural, as well as in revealed, religion, and have made of the exercise of this right a very lucrative trade. To keep this trade in repute, therefore, and themselves with it, two things have been thought necessary, and are really so. It has been thought

thought necessary to preserve the mystery which they found established in one part by the first professors of it, and to introduce mystery into the other. The method they take serves both these purposes. They slide into the proofs of natural, what they judge necessary to impose their artificial, theology. From these principles, laid out of vulgar sight, and, in truth, out of their own, they deduce even moral obligations: and thus the whole sum of religion falls under the direction of the religious society. How this society directs it, and to what purposes principally, appears plainly enough in the instance before us.

LXI.

WHATEVER may be determined about the moral fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, and the suitableness and unsuitableness of circumstances to persons, all of which are conceived to be eternal because we cannot conceive them to have been ever otherwise than they are, certain it is that they become discernible to us in our system alone; and that altho they are immutable natures in it, from whence all our obligations arise, and may be assumed to be absolutely and in themselves eternal as well as immutable, and therefore independent, if philosophers please to call them so; yet we neither know, nor can know any more about them than what the actual constitution of this system shews us. In some other system we might not have had the same ideas, or having them we might
not

not have had the same occasions of collecting them into the same complex modes. This we see happen in different countries; and what happens in different countries might surely happen in different systems. It is sufficient, therefore, to establish our moral obligations, that we consider them relatively to our own system. From thence they arise: and since they arise from thence it must be the will of that Being who made the system, that we should observe and practise them. The assumed eternity of morality cannot make it more obligatory. Why then are such pains taken to prove it eternal? The reason is obvious. If we went no higher than our own system, the principles of it would be easily discovered, the criterion of moral good and evil, of just and unjust would be fixed, and at least there would be no need of consulting divines about it. They lead the minds of men, therefore, to contemplate objects that are out of their system, and renew the platonic doctrine of eternal ideas, forms, essences, natures, according to which they assume that the Supreme Being regulates his own conduct; and all his rational creatures are obliged to regulate theirs by the eternal reason of things.

THEY prove the existence of an all-perfect Being, the creator and governor of the universe; and to demonstrate his infinite wisdom and power they appeal to his works. But when they have done this, which includes the whole of natural theology, and serves abundantly all the ends of natural religion, they parcel out a divine moral nature

nature into various attributes like the human, and determine precisely what these attributes require that God should do, to make his will conformable to the eternal ideas of fitness, which are so many independent natures. Thus they assume that God knows after the manner of men, by ideas; that his moral attributes are not barely names that we give to various manifestations of the infinite wisdom of one simple uncompounded being, but that they are in him, what they are in us, distinct affections, dispositions, habitudes; that they are in him the very same that they are in our ideas, being derived from the same eternal natures, and known by the same eternal reason; in fine, that we have no need to judge of his moral attributes as we judge of his physical, but are able to determine what they require that he should do, without any regard to what he has done. This is in plain and unexaggerated terms the very doctrine which CLARKE and other divines teach, presumptuous and profane as it is, under the disguise of modest and pious expressions. By these they frequently impose on readers who attend more to their theological cant, than to their meaning, and to the necessary consequences of what they advance; whilst they give other readers a just occasion to say of them what CLARKE * says of some theists, it matters not at all how honorably they may seem to speak of God, but what

* Quasi ego id curem quid ille aiat aut neget. Illud quaero, quid ei consentaneum sit dicere. Cic. De fin. Lib. ii.

. must

..... must needs in all reason be supposed to be their true opinion.

WHEN we reason humbly and cautiously from the phaenomena, we have a sure criterion to guide our judgments; and the undoubted word of God declared in his works, wherein he speaks most intelligibly to us, to authorise them. When we reason otherwise, not from the phaenomena, but to them, we have no such criterion to guide, nor any word, but the precarious word of man, to authorise, our judgments. In the place of real, we substitute fantastic natures, and in the place of common sense an imaginary reason of things. This sublime metaphysical reason, which deals so much in abstract ideas, is so imaginary, and by consequence so vague, that it serves the purpose of every divine alike in all their discordant opinions. Metaphysician, I think, never convinced metaphysician; neither is there any thing so absurd which may not be made in this method problematical; and when it is once made so, the absurdity is called a demonstration. The system of SPINOZA, derived at least from that of DES CARTES, is very absurd, and so are many propositions in that of HOBBS. But there are Spinozists and Hobbists still in the world, as well as Cartesians, and there might be possibly still more, if metaphysical arms alone were employed against them. Let it not be said that they are men of depraved understandings, and depraved morals. This is to rail, not to argue. Their parts and their morals are, no doubt, in general as
good

good as those of the men who oppose them; and if they conclude absurdly, it is because they reason absurdly, as they reason absurdly because they pursue an absurd method: for, to bring this discourse home to the present purpose, the fault is so truly in the method, that this assumed eternal reason has misled theists, as well as atheists, to such a degree that the last are not always the most impious of the two. The opinions mentioned in the last paragraph might stand for sufficient proofs. But there are many more. He who asserts, for instance, on his notions of the eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses and of the eternal reason of things, that the providence of God in the present state of mankind would be convicted of injustice, if there were only one innocent man unhappy, when it is notorious that there are several, or that God is unjust, because particular providences do not enough distinguish the virtuous from the wicked, is as grossly absurd, and much more impious than HOBBS, when he asserts that there is no such thing as innocence, nor guilt, till they are distinguished by civil laws, and the authority of the magistrate. He who asserts that a predestination of millions to damnation, before they are capable of being either innocent or guilty, is agreeable to the divine attributes, and an exertion of jurisdiction and power, not at all repugnant to the eternal fitness and reason of things, in a Being who is not the governor alone, but the creator of all beings, and has an absolute right to dispose of them as he shall think fit, is as impious as SPINOZA, who asserts one sole substance,

substance, and who denies, as in effect he did deny, any creator and governor of the universe.

THE impious doctrine of predestination, such as it has been taught and is still taught among Christians, is softened extremely at least, and the assumed proceedings of God towards men are brought almost within the bounds of credibility, by LOCKE's forced exposition of the famous ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. He understands what is said of the potter, who has a power to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor, out of the same lump of clay, to refer to men nationally, not personally, nor with regard to an eternal state, but to the right which God has of exalting one nation and depressing another, according to his good pleasure and the merits or demerits of such political bodies. This sense may be admitted, whilst that of an universal and absolute predestination of every individual, such as it is taught, deserves to be rejected with horror. It may be admitted the better, perhaps, because it is conformable enough to the sanctions of the law of nature. According to these, which regard mankind in general, as the law was given to mankind in general, virtue tends to the happiness, and vice to the misery of their several societies: and there seems, therefore, no great presumption in assuming that God does in any particular case, by a particular dispensation, that which is agreeable to the general tenor of his providence, and to the natural course of things. But it is impious to suppose that he acts relatively to particular

lar men, against the general tenor of his providence, and in a manner that shews partiality in his favors, cruelty in his judgments, and an arbitrary spirit in all his proceedings, directly opposite to that spirit of impartiality and benignity, which makes his sun to rise, and his rain to fall, on the just and the unjust. Mr. LOCKE's exposition of St. PAUL's text is in the first of these cases. St. AUSTIN's, and that of many divines who had once the vogue of orthodoxy, is in the second. In what sense the apostle understood his own doctrine, I presume not to determine. Thus much is certain, if he understood it as LOCKE did, he reasoned very rabbinically when he quoted the preference given to JACOB over a much better man, over ESAU, and the deliverance of the Israelites, and the destruction of the Egyptians by God for the glory of his name, in order to conclude a fortiori that the same God might, by virtue of the same power, reject the Jews, who were literally the seed of ABRAHAM, for refusing to acknowledge the Messiah, and call the Gentiles, who were figuratively this seed, for consenting to acknowledge him.

I HAVE said already how difficult it is to reconcile the scheme of particular providences to the general course of nature: and he who considers the many forced suppositions, that ingenious men have made to get over the difficulty, will be only the more convinced that it is insuperable. This scheme is, indeed, very unnecessary to those who

hold an absolute predestination : and since they leave neither freedom of will in man, nor what is called contingency in the course of events, they seem to anticipate any want of particular providences by supposing somewhat still less conceivable. We comprehend as little God's manner of knowing, as we do his manner of being; and we should, therefore, presume to reason no more about one, than about the other. But these men, applying their ideas of human to the divine knowledge, maintain that God could not foreknow certainly what is to happen, if he did not make it necessary and certain by pre-ordaining that it should happen. So they argue on their notion of prescience. Now, it seems, and it has seemed to me ever since I turned my thoughts to subjects of this kind, that the whole system of predestination may be blown up by the change of an improper word. Let us talk no more of prescience, nor imagine things future relatively to God, as they are relatively to man. Let us acknowledge his omniscience, to which the future is like the present, and we may conceive, without any extraordinary effort of mind, that he knows, tho he does not pre-ordain in the sense of predestinating, the future. If we persuade ourselves of this great truth, that the whole series of things is, at all times, actually present to the divine mind, we may say as properly that God knows things because they are actual to him, and not that they are actual to him because he knows them, or much less pre-ordains them ; as we say that things are seen by
us

us because they are visible, and not that they are visible because they are seen by us. They, who talk so much of prescience and predestination, would do well to consider, whether it be not more reasonable to think in this manner, than to adopt all the absurd, as well as impious, consequences that flow from their hypothesis, according to which there must be not one general system of nature, but as many natural and moral systems, as there are rational creatures; and the providence of God must be employed to carry on this aggregate of systems so distinctly and so steadily, that the innocence and happiness of some, and the guilt and misery of others, may be effectually secured, agreeably to their several predestinations.

LXII.

THE fact, that there are such particular providences as have been assumed, which would be so many miracles, in the strict sense of the word, if they were real, cannot be proved; unless we accept for proofs, in an age when miracles are scarce pretended out of your church, and scarce believed in it, all the ridiculous stories that passed in times of ignorance and superstition. I said that particular providences would be miracles, if they were real; and such they would be strictly, whether they were contrary to the established course of nature, or not; for the miracle consists in the extraordinary interposition, as much as in the nature of the thing brought to pass. In one case,

there could be no doubt of such an extraordinary and miraculous interposition. In the other, doubts might arise, the opinions of men might be divided, and yet the miracle be as real in one, as in the other. Nay, the reality might be made evident enough to remove these doubts by the occasions, by the circumstances, by the repetition of it on similar occasions, and with similar circumstances; and, above all, by this circumstance, that the assumed particular providence was a direct answer to particular prayers and acts of devotion offered up to procure it. Should fire rain down from heaven to burn one city, and the walls of another fall at the sound of the besiegers trumpets; should a destroying angel put one army to death in a night, and the sun stand still to give time for the entire defeat of another; neither the besiegers nor the besieged, the victorious nor the vanquished, could fail to see the omnipotent hand of God in these events. Should abundant showers descend from the clouds after a long drought, or fair weather succeed a wet season, tho nothing is more in the ordinary course of nature than these phaenomena, they would be esteemed particular providences, very reasonably, at Paris, if they happened as constantly as the shrine of Saint GENEVIEVE is carried in procession to procure one or the other.

INNUMERABLE cases of these kinds may be put hypothetically; but, happily for mankind, experience furnishes no authentic examples of the first
 sort,

sort ; nor any, well enough ascertained to become proofs, of the second. All the instances that can be brought of providences, which men assume to be particular, are so very like to the events which happen in the ordinary course of things, that they fall under the head of such as are problematical, and as are made particular by nothing but the voluntary applications of them. I say happily it is so ; for if it was otherwise, if providences were directed according to the different desires, and even wants of men, equally well entitled to the divine favor, the whole order of nature, physical and moral, would be subverted, and the affairs of mankind would fall into the utmost confusion. The laws of gravitation, for instance, must be sometimes suspended, and sometimes their effect must be precipitated. The tottering edifice must be kept miraculously from falling, whilst innocent men lived in it, or passed under it ; and the fall of it must be as miraculously determined to crush the guilty inhabitant or passenger. The free will of man, which no one can deny that he has, without lying or renouncing his intuitive knowledge, and which was so much regarded by God, that, we are told, he suffered ADAM to fall, and to involve all mankind in his guilt, rather than restrain it for a moment, for a moment would have saved us from original sin ; this free will must be often not only restrained, but determined irresistibly by still whispers, secret suggestions, and sudden influences.

How all this can be effected, and especially in

compliances with the wants and petitions of men so different and so repugnant to one another, is not only hard to say, but the very supposition may seem to imply contradiction with what we know of the constitution of things, and with our clearest and most distinct ideas. The affairs of men are connected by so many various relations, that the particular providence which puts a force on the mechanical laws of nature, and on the freedom of the human will, must do this very often, not in one or two instances alone, but in a multitude, to have it's effect in one. Again, the circumstances of individuals, the public conjunctures wherein numbers are involved, and the merits and demerits of particular men, as well as of collective bodies, are so nearly alike, and they return so often to be equally objects of these supposed providences, that no one, who does not think himself at liberty to affirm or deny any thing that his precarious hypothesis requires, will dare to pronounce where these providences have been, or should have been, employed, and where not. The scheme, if it were true, would be universal in extent, and continual in time: from whence these great absurdities arise, that the world would be governed by miracles till miracles lost their name, that the established order of natural causes and effects would be subverted, that the general rule would be absorbed in the exceptions to it, or that God would govern his human creatures by two rules that do not consist very well together; since by one of them the wants and the petitions of these creatures

creatures would be submitted to one common providence which carried on the affairs of the world, according to the first constitution and original laws of it; and, by the other, this common providence would break, if I may say so, into a multitude of particular providences for the supply of these wants, and the grant of these petitions, every one of which is an appeal to the second rule of government against the first.

AMONG other attempts which have been made to solve these difficulties, and to reconcile the assumed scheme to the actual and visible, it has been urged, that God may possibly have so ordered the whole series of things, from the commencement to the consummation of this system *, that all particular cases may have been provided for in the original design, that they may be parts of it, and therefore consistent with it. It has been urged further, that, the particular natures and actions of all the sons of ADAM having been known to God, it is very possible that he may introduce them into the world at such times, and in such places and circumstances, that they may be, even according to the general course of nature, the instruments or the objects of particular providences. These are very arbitrary suppositions, and such surely as give little satisfaction to the mind. Without entering further than they deserve into the examination of them, it may be said, and it may be shewn, that they come up very nearly to that of an absolute

* Relig. of nature delin.

predestination, and are at least as whimsically invented to this purpose, as that of a pre-established harmony is to another. The example of the planets, which is brought to illustrate one of these hypotheses, will not appear extremely apposite. They are disposed so as to perform their dance regularly, in various conjunctions and oppositions, without any new impressions, or any alterations in the laws of motion. But is this the case of moral and free agents? The planets make their revolutions, and maintain their order, by the inviolable laws of their system, which nothing but the will of God can alter. They have in themselves no principle that can determine their motions in contradiction to these laws. But whether we suppose situations and conjunctures prepared for men, or men for situations and conjunctures, they may act, by the freedom of their will, against all these preparations and destinations, in spite of time, place, and circumstance. But God foresaw that they would not, says the metaphysician; and you assert that God may foresee future events without pre-ordaining them. Yes, foresee, or rather see, as he knows all the most contingent events that happen in the course of his general providence, but not provide for particular cases, nor determine the existence of particular men, in the manner assumed, without pre-ordaining. Their voluntary actions may coincide with an unpredestinated state of things. But that certain ideal men should come into existence to perform these voluntary actions in such an unpredestinated conjuncture precisely,

precisely, is a very evident predestination, and as much a particular providence as if these dispositions, and these conjunctures, had been the effects of many miraculous interpositions.

It will be of little service to the scheme of particular providences to say, like WOLLASTON, that there may be incorporeal, at least invisible beings, of intellects and powers superior to men, and capable of mighty things; and that these beings may be the ministers of God, and the authors of many of these providences: for that there may be, is no proof that there are such beings. To affirm that we stand in the highest rank of intellectual creatures, would be extreme folly; and to deny that there may be a chain of intelligence, through several systems, up from man, would be to contradict, without reason, what reason and analogy render very probable. That such creatures may be the inhabitants of other planets, and dispersed in these habitations, through the universe, is a notion so favored by appearances, and so agreeable to the majesty of God, and to the immensity of his works, that no reasonable man will reject, in the present improved state of astronomy, what some of the most antient astronomers suspected. But the difference is great between adopting an opinion thus founded, and the opinions of antient astrologers, and of the knaves or madmen who professed theurgic magic. Yet these were the first philosophers who invented such beings as are still assumed. They imposed them on the east, and the

the east has imposed them on the west. They were not a little embarrassed about their habitations. They placed some in heaven. These were the angels, or messengers, whom the Supreme Being employed on the most important occasions; and, not to enter into the more perplexed and obscure parts of this doctrine, the greatest number of them were demons and genii, who rambled about in imaginary spaces, the intermundia of EPICURUS, but principally in our atmosphere, that they might be at hand to take care of men, and to direct the conduct of human affairs. But now, admitting that there are such beings, and that they are thus employed; I would ask, do they act by the immediate command of God, or do they not? If you, who defend the scheme of particular providences, say that they do; you leave the matter just where it was, and God governs the world no longer by his general providence alone, but mediately, if not immediately, by particular providences likewise, so little consistent with it that they would be useless if they were not wrought in opposition to it, or to supply the defects of it. If you say that they do not; under how strange a government do you place mankind, when you give any share of it to these beings, and suppose that they exercise it in proper places, and according to their greater abilities?

I NEITHER say, nor think, that divines mean to blaspheme. God forbid that I should be as uncharitable as they are. But this I say, that he who follows

follows them cannot avoid presumption and profaneness, and must be much on his guard to avoid blasphemy. Consider, under one view, their whole proceeding. God made the world, they say, for the sake of man; and he made man only to indulge his goodness in communicating happiness to so noble a creature. God preserves the world he has made. His providence presides over all his works, animate and inanimate, and principally over men, those rational beings whom he has created in his own image. But this providence is general, and, therefore, insufficient to answer all the purposes of his goodness and his justice, in an immense variety of contingent events, and with regard to the merits and demerits of every man. It is essential, therefore, to these, and especially to the last, that there should be particular providences to take care of rational beings in every particular case, which there are not; and to make a due distribution of good and evil among them constantly, because any one instance to the contrary is inconsistent with God's moral attributes, and shakes the belief of his existence. He governs, therefore, by particular providences, and provides by them for particular cases that are not provided for in the administration of a general providence. Be it so. All you ask is granted. Are you reconciled to the justice of God's government? Are you satisfied? By no means, reply these divines, and such theists as WOLLASTON. These particular providences are exercised so rarely, so secretly, or some how or other so ineffectually, that his government continues

nues liable to the same charge of injustice, and cannot be reconciled to his attributes, and to the eternal reason of things, without the help of an hypothesis, which it is but reasonable we should make to distinguish ourselves from the atheistical tribe, and to justify that God, whom we accused in concert with them, whilst our alliance lasted, and as far as the conditions of it extended.

AFTER this, will it not be permitted me to say, that if these men do not blaspheme directly, little less than blasphemy, nay blasphemy itself, is deduced directly by their allies from the principles they lay down? I will say this at least, that they talk profanely, and argue presumptuously, in very devout, and sometimes in very modest, terms. Will it not be permitted me to say that these men seem to be in the kingdom of God, what the ringleaders of faction are in a state? Men would be angels, and we see in MILTON that angels would be gods. The pretensions of men are exorbitant; yet all they demand is presumed to be of right and whatever falls short of their demands to be a denial of a right founded in the original institution of his government by God: for of any original contract or covenant between him and man, except that which the Jews boast he made with their ancestors, we never heard; tho divines talk sometimes of a covenant, which they are pleased to call of grace. To finish this allusion, let me add that when factions devise expedients to redress the grievances of which they complain, they

they are commonly such as seem to redress, rather than redress, and as make the sovereign little amends for all the violence they have offered to his prerogative, and for all they have said and done against him.

LXIII.

IT is high time that we should have recourse to a better authority, than that of man, to the authority of God himself; that we should consider how he has made us, and in what circumstances he has placed us; that we should declare what he has done to be agreeable to his infinite wisdom, and to all his other perfections, because he has done it; and that we should prepare our minds to be grateful and resigned. To lead us then into this track of thought, let it be observed that the phaenomena of nature, the greatest and the most minute, establish the doctrine of final causes, and, therefore, the intelligence of the first cause, by innumerable proofs which are at all times obvious to our senses. Many of these proofs amount to geometrical certainty; since a multitude of things, which might be made in manners, and placed in positions almost infinite, are so made, so placed, so contrived, that they are visibly appropriated to the particular uses to which they serve, and to no other. If the scheme of particular providences was supported by proofs like these, no reasonable man could doubt of the truth of it. But it is not so supported. The facts are often wholly uncertain,

tain, or mingled up with fabulous circumstances, or distinguished, without reason, from those which happen under the direction of a general providence, by superstition and artifice; so that proofs of the falsity of particular providences are in proportion as frequent as those of the reality of final causes. We are justified, therefore, in affirming one, and in not affirming the other; whilst they who affirm both are justified by their proceeding in affirming neither. They affirm the doctrine of final causes often on proofs which the phaenomena contradict, and which the doctrine established independently of them does not want. They affirm that of particular providences without any proofs which the phaenomena furnish.

THE two assumed propositions I have mentioned so often, that man is the final cause of the world, and that the communication of happiness to him is the final cause of his creation, are most certainly false, as the scheme of particular providences that force the laws of nature is no doubt, and as that may be which supposes these providences exercised in a manner agreeable to these laws. That the world is fitted in many respects to be the habitation of men, or that men are fitted for this habitation, is true. But will it follow, even from the first, that the world therefore was made for the sake of man, any more, than it will follow that it was made for any other species of animals, for all of whom, according to their several natures, it is equally well fitted, and for all of whom we
may

may believe on this account very reasonably that it was made, as well as for us? It is as well fitted for Bownce as for you, with respect to physical nature; and, with respect to moral nature, Bownce has little to do beyond hearkening to the still whispers, the secret suggestions, and the sudden influences of instinct. In the works of men, the most complicated schemes produce, very hardly and very uncertainly, one single effect. In the works of God, one single scheme produces a multitude of different effects, and answers an immense variety of purposes. Whatever was the final cause of the world, whatever motive, for we must speak after the manner of men, the first cause had to create it, which motive could not arise from any thing without himself, and must be, therefore, resolved into his mere will; we conceive easily that infinite wisdom, which determined, and infinite power, which executed, the plan of the universe, had some secondary, some inferior regard, in making this and every other planet, to all the creatures that were to inhabit them, tho neither any of these creatures, nor all of them, were, in a proper sense, the final causes for which these planets were created. When we look down on other animals, we discern a distance, but a very measurable distance, between us and them. When we look up to our common Creator, the distance is immeasurable, for it is infinite. In the first view, as we have some superiority, we are ready to claim a preference due to us over them. But in the second, and relatively to God, we can boast of no such claim. As the distance

distance is infinite from them, so it is from us, to him; for there are no degrees of more or less in infinite.

THIS reflection alone should have kept philosophers within the bounds of modesty. But neither this reflection, nor a great many others, which inward consciousness and outward observation suggest, have been able to do it. No men have reasoned so dogmatically about the divine nature and perfections, nor have supposed them so much on a level with human conceptions, as the philosophers and divines who have talked the most, and the most inconsistently by consequence, of their incomprehensibility. Some of the heathens asserted the soul of man to be a participation of the divinity, or an emanation from it. Christians have been very little more modest. St. AUSTIN taught that the soul of man is the highest of created beings, and that there is nothing superior, except the creator himself: and the philosophers we speak of here teach that God's manner of knowing, as secret as impenetrable as his manner of being, is the same as ours; that he knows by ideas, and that without them he could not have made, nor could govern what he has made*. The vanity of being rational, a title they ascribe to God as well as to man, turns their heads. But what is their rationality? The first principles of all their knowledge are not common to God and them, but to them and to the beasts of the field. The improve-

* Vid. MALEBRANCHE.

ments they make, on the same principles, beyond their fellow creatures, are owing to this, that they have better, and perhaps more, intellectual faculties than the others, as the others have better, and perhaps more, corporeal senses than they have. The reason of this difference seems to be, that such improvements in knowledge are necessary to the well-being of men, to their station, and to their destination, as are not necessary to those of other animals. This reason will appear, I think, true, if we consider that as far as these improvements are necessary to the purposes I have mentioned, they are easy; the knowledge we acquire by them is real, and rationality is a perfection in our nature: whereas in proportion to the attempts we make to carry them beyond this point, they grow harder and harder; our knowledge grows less and less real, till it terminates in mere conjecture, or in manifest error; and this very rationality becomes an imperfection in our nature, or gives, as it gave to COTTA, a pretence to call it so.

THIS might be illustrated by many examples, by that of religion particularly. Man is a religious as well as a social creature, made to know and to adore his Creator, to discover and to obey his will, to conform himself, not to an imaginary abstract reason of things, but to that reason which results from his own constitution and from the constitution of the system to which he belongs, whereby many things indifferent in themselves, and no way obligatory on other animals, cease

VOL. V.

H

to

to be indifferent, and are obligatory on him. Thus far the principles of religion, and the duties of it, are easy to be known: and if the one were known, and the other known and practised, only thus far, it would have, in great measure at least, it's genuine effect. But men have not been content with this knowledge. Artificial theology and superstition have perplexed the principles, and overloaded the duties of it, till it is grown unintelligible, and in many instances impracticable, or unfit to be practised.

GREATER powers of reason, and means of knowledge, have been measured out to us than to other animals, that we might be able to fulfil the superior purposes of our destination, whereof religion is, no doubt, the chief. But they have been measured out to us thus far, and no further; whilst in those inferior purposes (for such we ought to esteem them) that regard animal life, other creatures have by nature the advantage over men. The elevation and pre-eminence of our species consist in the former alone. But tho they are great, they do not take us out of the class of animality; and the metaphysician who fancies himself rapt up in pure intellect, and even abstracted from his material part, will feel hunger and thirst, and roar out in a fit of the stone. I am far from thinking the condition of mankind as unhappy as the same writers, who maintain that the world was made for the sake of man, and man merely to have happiness communicated to him, represent

represent it to be. But yet I am persuaded, and so must every man be who is capable of reflection, that his condition would have been very different from what it is, if the hypothesis of these men had been true. In short, without regard to the exaggerations of the elder *PLINY*, who makes the human state as despicable as he can, we shall find sufficient reason to say, on our own observation of the progress of human life, and not of the beginnings of it only, how mad are men when they entertain such high opinions of their own elevation, and think themselves born to be proud! “*Heu dementiam ab his initiis existimantium ad superbiam se genitos *!*”

LXIV.

TH O God does not govern the world by particular providences, and tho it seems to be contrary to what infinite wisdom has established that he should, yet are we not, nor has mankind ever been, without God, and the evident marks of his providence, in the world. Look back as far as history and tradition give you any light. Consider the present course of things in the physical and moral systems. Which way soever you turn yourself, you will meet with God, “*Deum videbis occurrentem tibi †;*” and may say to the divine what the good man, whom *SOCRATES* mentions in his Ecclesiastical history, said to the philosopher ‖: My book is the nature of things which is always

* *PLIN.* L. vii.

† *SEN.* De benef.

‖ L. iv.

at hand when I am desirous to read the words of God: "*Meus liber, ô philosophe, est natura rerum, quae quidem praesto est quoties Dei verba legere libuerit.*" What we read in that book is undoubtedly the word of God: and in that we shall find no foundation for a scheme like this of particular providences. We shall find that the course of things has been always the same; that national virtue and national vice have always produced national happiness and national misery in a due proportion, and are, by consequence, the great sanctions, as it is said above, of the law of nature. We shall find that these sanctions are sufficient, in terrorem, to the collective bodies of men, and that the punishment of individuals is left to the discipline of those laws which every society makes for its own sake, and which are suggested by the law of nature, to prevent, by private punishments, the growth of public misfortunes. We shall find that he, who made, preserves the world, and governs it on the same principles, and according to the same invariable laws, which he imposed at first. Invariable they are, no doubt: and that difference of events, which gives occasion to the distinction of ordinary and extraordinary, is nothing more than the natural effect of them. Comets, nay eclipses, were thought to be extraordinary apparitions that portended extraordinary events, till experience and observation made them familiar, and astronomers began to calculate their returns.

THE laws we speak of are so truly invariable,
that

that the same face of nature and the same course of things have been preserved from the first, in heaven and on earth, under the direction of the same general providence. The celestial bodies moved in the same order five or ten thousand years ago that they move now. The inanimate parts of our globe, the vegetable and the animal world, have been constituted, maintained, and propagated in the same manner; and whatever difference the most antient patriarchs, or the first of men, if they were to come into life again, might find in the works of art, they would find none in those of nature; so that, when a great philosopher says that ADAM would find a new world, he must be understood to mean that the first of men would find a great deal more of the old one discovered: as we say that COLUMBUS found a new world when he discovered America. These laws, tho they are invariable, are general too, and as such they admit of much contingency. Matter, as we conceive it, is purely passive, can act no otherwise than it is acted upon according to the first impressions of motion that were given by the first mover, and is, therefore, less liable to contingency, because more immediately, and more absolutely, under the influence of those laws by which the motion of it, the first of second causes, is continued. The first gleams of thought appear in our animal system, and with them the powers of willing, and of beginning motion. Thought improves, and the exercise of these powers grows more frequent and more considerable, as the sy-

stem rises. As it rises, therefore, there is more room for contingency of events under the general and invariable laws imposed on the whole kind, or on the particular species. But in no species is there so much room of this sort as in the human. Other animals seem to act more agreeably to the laws, each of his own nature, and more uniformly than man, by that secret determination of the will, which is knowable only by its effects like every other kind of force, which we call instinct, and which may answer in natural influences, to what the divines call grace in those that they suppose to be supernatural. This influence, whatever it be, is, I think, more extensive and more durable in other animals than in us. It serves them in more particulars, and seems to have the sole direction of their conduct through life. It has, at least, the principal direction, even in those of them in whom we perceive some glimmerings of rationality, and some partial indications of a moral nature.

BUT now in man, instinct does no more than point out the first rudiments of the law of his nature. Reason does, or should do the rest. Reason, instructed by experience, shews the law, and the sanctions of it, which are as invariable and as uniform as the law; for in all the ages of the world, and among all the societies of men, the well-being or the ill-being of these societies, and, therefore, of all mankind, has borne a constant proportion to the observation or neglect of it. God has given to his human creatures the mate-
rials

rials of physical and moral happiness, if I may say so, in the physical and moral constitution of things. He has given them faculties and powers necessary to collect and apply these materials, and to carry on the work, of which reason is the architect, as far as these materials, these faculties, these powers, and the skill of this architect, admit. This the Creator has done for us. What we shall do for ourselves he has left to the freedom of our elections; for free-will seems so essential to rational beings, that I presume we cannot conceive any such to be without it, tho we easily conceive them restrained in the execution of what they will. This plan is that of divine wisdom; and whatever our imaginations may suggest, we know nothing more particular, and indeed nothing at all more, of the constitution and order of the human system, nor of the dispensations of providence, than this.

AGREEABLY to this plan, men have been every where intent to procure to themselves all the physical comforts of life, and solicitous to defend themselves against all the physical evils. In the first, they have succeeded every where so well, that they enjoy, not only the necessaries and comforts, but the luxuries, of life; for there is the luxury of Scythians as well as of Sybarites, of Americans as well as of Europeans, and of the cottage as well as of the palace. In the second, as in the first, and in every human invention and institution, there is something that is imperfect, something that falls short of the end that we propose, by de-

fect of knowledge, or by defect of power. But even in this, the success of mankind has been great; since they have found means universally, even the most savage have found them, to prevent or to cure many of those physical evils to which they stand exposed, and to alleviate those which they can neither prevent nor cure. This has been done variously and by slow degrees, but it has been always doing, and distempers were cured and many physical evils averted before the great improvements of experimental philosophy were made. They are so, even now, in countries where these improvements were never heard of.

AGREEABLY to the same plan, moral good has been promoted, moral evil has been restrained, and the general state of mankind has been greatly improved in this respect, as well as in the other; tho in this respect many more and more frequent contingencies are to be guarded against than in the other, because they arise in the moral system from the most uncertain principle imaginable, the free will of man: and in the other, they are such alone as certain laws and an established order of things admit. Physical contingencies are rather apparent than real. But moral contingencies are very real: and yet they are guarded against so well, and the principles and practice of morality are so well maintained in the several societies of men, that they produce no great disorders in these, and there are, on the whole, vastly more innocent than guilty persons.

LXV.

I AM not unacquainted with the various refinements of ingenious men about the freedom of the human will. Some of them have assumed it to be a freedom from external compulsion only, and not from internal necessity. Others have assumed it to be a freedom from both: and there are those who assign not only freedom to the will, but a natural indifference, which is not excited to chuse because an object is agreeable antecedently to the choice, but chuses for the pleasure it finds in chusing, and makes the object agreeable by this choice*. The first seem to me to leave neither contingency, nor virtue, nor vice, in the world. They establish an universal necessity, of one sort at least. The last seem to me to transfer in some sort to man, what belongs to God. There is an agent, no doubt, who makes things good and agreeable by chusing them, and who is not determined to his choice ab extra, by any pre-existent goodness in the objects. But this agent is not that passive creature man, who acts, when he does act, according to the contingent impressions of outward objects on him, or according to those remote objects which his imagination represents to him; for in this scene alone, and a large one it is, free-will does, and I suppose can, exercise itself. The second opinion is so evidently true, that I cannot conceive it would have been liable to any contra-

* Vid. KING De orig. mali.

dition, if philosophers had not done in this case, what they do in many, if they had not rendered what is clear, obscure by explanations, and what is certain, problematical by engraftments.

INTO these subtil and perplexed disquisitions I have no design to enter with them. I write to you, and for you ; and you would think yourself little obliged to me, if I took the pains of explaining in prose, what you would not think it necessary to explain in verse, and in the character of a poetical philosopher, who may dwell in generalities. But besides this, I have another reason, which would weigh with me on every other, as well as on this, occasion. I fear to go out of my depth in sounding imaginary fords that are real gulphs, and wherein many of the tallest philosophers have been drowned, whilst none of them ever got over to the science they had in view. Here even LOCKE, that cautious philosopher, was lost ; and here they who have followed and refuted him, like those who went before them all, have succeeded no better : so true is that saying of MONTAIGNE, when men attempt to carry knowledge far, “ tout finit dans l'éblouissement,” the sight is dazzled, and nothing is seen clearly.

INSTEAD of consulting these writers, therefore, let us consult ourselves. Let us at least attend to them no further, than our inward reflection and our intuitive knowledge confirm their opinions. The material world is an immense scene. Num-
bers

bers of men, and numbers of ages, have been employed to acquire knowledge; and, where this has fallen short, to make hypotheses, sometimes useful, concerning the constitution of it, and the laws according to which bodies act on bodies, in order to apply them to the service of mankind. No man's experience can instruct him sufficiently in this science, even for the most ordinary uses of life. Every one must lean on that of others, the illiterate universally, and the most learned in many parts; since no one of them is able to embrace and cultivate alike the whole. But knowledge of the intellectual world is more confined as to the principles of it, and, therefore, less confined as to the persons equally capable of acquiring all the real knowledge that is to be acquired about it. I say, real knowledge; because hypotheses, which are often admitted very reasonably and very usefully in one case, have no pretence to be admitted in the other. Physical hypotheses, which go beyond knowledge, but are founded on it, may be admitted, not only because we must accept probability for certainty on many occasions, always, but because when we accept it in these cases, we accept it, as it were, *pro interim*. None of the phaenomena stand in opposition to the present probability, and they all lie open to future discoveries; so that by the same means by which we attain to this probability, we may attain hereafter to certainty, and, in the mean time, the former can be convicted of no error. The hypotheses of metaphysicians are very different from these. They
are

are often framed in direct contradiction to the phaenomena : and, if they are so once, they must be so always ; for the phaenomena are, in this case, always the same, no new ones arise, and there are no means of further discoveries. The phaenomena of our intellectual system lie in a narrow compass, for the whole system is within us, and we have but to turn our eyes inward to have intuitive knowledge of it. Moral philosophers may draw different corollaries from the known operations of the mind, determinations of the will, and motives of human actions : but nothing can be more futile than the attempts of metaphysicians, to shew, by tedious abstract reasoning, what the internal phaenomena in themselves are, instead of appealing to our intuitive conscious knowledge of them. They would not be a jot more ridiculous, if they attempted to demonstrate, most philosophically, to a man whose eyes are open, what those objects are which he sees, or may see, at a due distance, and through a proper medium.

I HAVE said something here and there in these minutes, already, concerning the principles of our moral system, in order to shew how it may be, and how it has been improved, and to justify the providence of God on this head, as well as on that of our physical system. In this place, let it be observed to the same purpose again, that, altho the human will be free from external compulsion and internal necessity, yet it is liable to be determined often by sensible and intellectual affections ; for I shall

shall not make the distinction *SENECA* makes, between affections and the *principia praeludentia affectibus*. I am conscious that this is so, for I am conscious that I have determined too often, in compliance with my appetite, and in favor of pleasure, regardless of happiness, not only against my reason in general, but against the immediate, the instantaneous act of my understanding: as I am likewise conscious that I have determined sometimes, and I wish I had done so much oftener, in compliance with my reason, and in favor of happiness, not only against my appetite, but against my appetite excited by an immediate object. I am not more certain that I exist, than I am that all this is true: and since it is true of me, I conclude that it is so, in some degree or other, of all mankind. Now, amidst the contingencies that must arise from this constitution of every individual in the complicated affairs of his life, and in that diversity of relations in which he stands, I need not go about to prove that the odds will be always on the side of appetite, from which affections arise, as affections grow up afterwards into passions, which reason cannot quite subdue in the strongest minds, and by which she is perpetually subdued in the weakest. Had the allwise Creator implanted in every man a moral sense, which may be acquired in some sort by long habits of virtue, and the warmth of true philosophical devotion, but which it is whimsical to assume to be natural; had he done more, had he determined men to the practice

tice of virtue, as he has to the preservation of their beings, by irresistible instinct ; or had he appointed particular providences for particular men, to make them good, and to reward them for being so ; there would have been, in the freedom of human will, no chance for immorality ; or rather this freedom would have been taken from us, in all occurrences of a moral nature, by the internal necessity of such an instinct, or the external compulsion of such providences. But no one of these methods, which self-sufficient philosophers have thought it necessary that God should take to secure the moral happiness of mankind, by securing in all events the morality of individuals, has appeared necessary to the purposes of divine wisdom. It is plain, by the whole course of God's providence, that he regards his human creatures collectively, not individually, how worthy soever every one of them deems himself to be a particular object of the divine care. He has given them indifferently, and in common, the means of arriving at happiness in their moral, as in their physical state ; and has left it to them to improve these means, that they may obtain this end.

In this respect he has dealt with them alike in both. But the progress of these improvements is very different. It goes from individuals to collective bodies in one case, and from collective bodies to individuals in the other. Particular men have made discoveries, and invented arts, beneficial to the whole species. The generality has
adopted

adopted them. Their immediate utility has maintained them in practice, and appetite and reason have conspired to set the undivided force of self-love on their side. But our improvements in morality have always had, and must always have, a very different progress. Some few particular men may discover, explain, and press upon others, by advice and example, the moral obligations that are incumbent on all. This alone will have little effect, and our moral state will be little improved by it. This improvement, therefore, in themselves and in others, is not trusted to the reason of particular men. It is a principal object of the universal reason of mankind. For this purpose governments have been instituted, laws have been made, customs have been established, children have been trained up to morality by education, and men have been deterred from immorality by various punishments, which human justice inflicts. When these means are employed effectually in any society of men, the moral state of that society is happy. When they are employed ineffectually, which must be always the fault of those to whom government is committed, the state of that society is miserable. Individuals are the objects of human justice; societies of men, of divine justice. When the former is not exercised effectually, the latter is; and no physical causes produce their effects more naturally, nor more surely, than general depravity produces general misery.

LXVI.

SUCH is the constitution of things, and such the divine economy in the government of mankind. God has given us the desire of happiness, and the means of attaining to it. He has given us faculties sufficient to discover, and to improve, these means. What could we ask more of a beneficent Creator? Let us adore his goodness, and his justice (if we will ascribe our ideas of moral attributes to him) as well as his wisdom, and his power. Let us give him thanks for bestowing existence upon us, in the system to which we belong; whilst profane antitheistical writers refuse to own that he himself exists, unless there be another. Our state, in this world, is a state not of pure, but of mixed, happiness. As we are material beings, we are subject to generation and corruption, and to many physical evils that arise necessarily from this constitution. As we are intellectual beings, but endowed with very imperfect intelligence, we are liable to much error, and to many moral evils, that arise from hence, and that we bring on one another. If this were our case, without any thing more, the human state would be very deplorable indeed: and that it is our case, we should be induced to think, if we gave credit to the partial representations of divines and atheists, one of whom defame, and the other deny, the Supreme Being. But our own experience, our own reflections, and, above all, the excellent

cellent writings of those who apply natural philosophy to confirm and improve natural religion, will lead us to God, by sensible demonstrations, much more strongly, than the others can lead us from him by metaphysical jargon, and theological declamation. In short, however mixed, and however moderate, the general happiness of mankind may be, it is real, animal happiness : and he who affirms absolute non-existence preferable to existence in such a state as ours, like the persons *PLINY* alledges *, “ qui non nasci optimum censerent, “ aut quam ocissime aboleri,” scarcely deserves an answer. Let philosophers carry on this dispute as long as they please, it must always terminate in a question not hard to resolve ; “ whether it “ was most agreeable to the wisdom of the Crea- “ tor, to make the world and man as they are “ made ; or to make the former a wheel unfit to “ roll in it’s place in the great machine of the “ universe, and the latter a creature so superior to “ his actual rank in the scale of intelligent beings, “ that this rank must have been void, and the “ scale imperfect ? ”

THAT there are other material intelligent creatures, inhabitants of other planets, we have great reason to believe, and none to doubt. As they may be superior to us in their nature and objects, in their several degrees less unworthy of the divine munificence, so their happiness may be greater

* Nat. hist. 1. vii.

than ours. Yet these creatures, even the noblest of them, must be liable to some inconveniencies at least, both physical and moral. Angels and glorified saints, who are said to live with God, and, therefore, above the reach of those effects of matter and motion which are felt in other systems, can be alone exempt from the first: and whether these beings, who are finite still, however glorified, can be exempt from the latter, theology must determine; it is not an object of common sense. Nay, theology has already determined it, in the case of those angels and archangels, who were driven from heaven for their ambition and rebellion against God. Some divines there are, who assume that the expulsion of these superior beings made room for men; that the earth is a nursery for heaven, to which the elect, a competent number of whom will be completed before the end of the world, are to be admitted: and that as creatures of a lower class are encouraged to better their condition by a right use of their faculties, according to this economy, so those of an higher, the highest of created beings, are deterred from the abuse of theirs. They may abuse these faculties then: and there may be 'moral evil, even in heaven *.

But however all this may be, since infinite wisdom designed that there should be various orders of intellectual beings in the plan of the universe, differently placed, differently constituted, and some superior to others; it will follow that nothing can be more absurd, than the com-

* Vid. notes to the treat. De orig. mali. c. 5. sec. 5.

plaints of creatures who are in one of these orders, that they are not in another: if, in truth, there are any creatures, except men, unreasonable enough to make such complaints. They complain of their own constitution, and of the constitution of the system wherein they are placed, as loudly as if the Supreme Being was obliged in justice to give them their choice, in some inconceivable manner, how and where they would exist, before he made them to exist. They complain of the uniform conduct of that general providence which is over all his works, as if his justice, repugnant, in this case, to his wisdom, required that he should govern creatures, whom he brought into existence that they might compose a distinct order and complete the scale of intellectual being, in a manner that would confound the several orders, and interrupt the scale. Some have condemned the creation, some the government, of the world, and some both. The discoveries made, and every day making, in natural philosophy, have shewn so many things, which were thought useless, or hurtful, to be necessary, or beneficial, that a man who should talk like *LUCRETIVS*, and others, about the physical world, would be at this time ridiculous. But he who talks as extravagantly as *COTTA*, and many others, about the moral world, is still sure to be heard with attention.

THAT creatures should censure their Creator in the government of the world he has made and preserves,

serves, would appear surprizing and shocking, if men had not been familiarised with this language. But how should they not be familiarised with it, when the preachers of natural and revealed religion have been the loudest in holding it, tho not the first indeed, for they have done nothing more than repeat what all the atheists, from DEMOCRITUS and EPICURUS, have said? Like them, they have insisted much on what they assume that God should have done, and has not done, to promote and secure the happiness of his human creatures; whilst they have passed over lightly what he has been pleased to do for both these purposes. I might undertake to prove that TITUS and TRAJAN were tyrants of the Roman empire, as well as NERO, by the same method by which they attempt to prove that the Supreme Being is the tyrant of the world he governs. They have pushed such arguments on this subject, and they have pushed them so far, that the whole tribe of these writers, like WOLLASTON and CLARKE, whom I have mentioned, do in effect renounce the God whom you and I adore, as much as the rankest of the atheistical tribe. Your priests, and our parsons, will exclaim most pathetically, and rail outrageously, at this assertion: but have a little patience, and I will prove it, to their shame, to be true.

THAT there is room for much contingency in the physical and moral world, under the direction of a general providence, has been said already; and that, amidst these contingencies, happiness, outward

outward happiness at least, may fall to the lot of wicked, and outward unhappiness to that of good, men. But then this general proposition is of very uncertain application; too uncertain, by far, to be made a rule by which to judge of the dispensations of providence. There is, generally speaking, less immorality, and less morality, worthy to draw down interpositions of divine vengeance or favor, and more innocence, perhaps, in the world, than is commonly apprehended. But however this be, divines, above all men, have the least reason to insist on the objection, taken from the assumed unhappiness of good men, since they cannot do so without manifest inconsistency. That innocent children should be punished to the third and fourth generation, for the sins of their guilty fathers, nay that the whole race of mankind should be punished for the sin of one man, they hold agreeable to the justice of God; because they believe, on the faith of the scriptures, that he has proceeded, and proceeds, in this manner with mankind. But that men, apparently innocent, should be exposed to any sort of evil, they hold repugnant to his justice; altho they affirm on their knowledge, not their belief, that his providence suffers this to happen in the course of human affairs.

DIVINES are not only thus inconsistent, they have on another account, and, as preachers of christianity, a worse grace, than any men whatever, to cry out so loudly against the evil that happens

sometimes to good men. They assert that the law of grace is much more perfect than the law of nature; and that revelation inspires much more sublime notions of the Deity, and of piety towards him, than reason. But how has it come to pass, then, that heathen theists defended the divine providence against atheists who attacked it, and recommended a chearful resignation to all the dispensations of it; whereas christian divines have made a common cause with atheists to attack this providence, and to murmur against the necessary submission that they pay? Admirable precepts, and illustrious examples, of the first kind, may be quoted from Paganism. I will mention the first that occurs to me. *SENECA*, who pleaded the cause of God against atheists, as I plead it actually against divines, heard the philosopher *DEMETRIUS* break out in his sufferings into this rapturous expression: "Immortal gods, I have but one complaint to make; why was your will no sooner communicated to me? Had I known it sooner, I would have run to meet what I am now called to suffer." The passage is so very fine, that it deserves a place, not in the margin, but in the text, and to be cited in the original. "*Hoc unum, dii immortales, de vobis queri possum, quod non ante mihi voluntatem vestram notam fecistis; prior enim ad ista venissem, ad quae nunc vocatus adsum.*" Few can arrive at this pious fortitude of mind, but we should all endeavour it: and the Christian, who goes murmuring and complaining through this life against the justice of

of God, deserves little to taste of his goodness in any other state.

HEATHEN, as well as christian, philosophers, who believed that all things were made for the sake of man, found it hard to reconcile the phaenomena to this hypothesis : and, unless they could do so, they found themselves embarrassed with this hypothesis in maintaining the existence of an all-wise and all-powerful Being against the cavils of atheists. The former, however, did their utmost, both on the supposition of a general providence, and of particular providences, to answer all these cavils. They did it too, not only plausibly, but strongly, in many instances ; and would suffer, in no case, the hypothesis of a future state, if they did at all admit any such, to unravel the demonstration they had made. The hypothesis might be true : they knew that the demonstration was so. The hypothesis might be true in part only, and relatively to some of the phaenomena : they knew that the demonstration was true in the whole, and that the infinite wisdom and power of God were manifest alike in all the phaenomena. They might have had an entire recourse to this hypothesis, if they had pleased, for it had been invented early in Egypt, and elsewhere ; and have attempted to untie, by one, the knot they had tied by another, as christian divines have done since. But this doctrine was never firmly enough established in the philosophical, whatever it was in the vulgar, creed ; and, besides, they might think it insufficient for

their purpose in any of the various manners wherein it was taught.

THE conduct of christian philosophers has been very different from this. Far from defending the providence of God, they have joined in the clamor against it. They have brought him to the bar of humanity : and the self-existent Being, the first cause of all things that are, the creator, the preserver, the governor, of the universe, in whom we live, and move, and have our beings, has been tried, convicted, and condemned, for his government of the world, on the general principles of human justice ; like the governor of a province, or any other inferior magistrate. Nothing has hindered even those who pretend to be his messengers, his ambassadors, his plenipotentiaries, from renouncing their allegiance to him, as they themselves have the front to avow, but the hypothesis of another state ; wherein it is supposed that he will vindicate his justice, and make amends for whatever is irregular, and unjust, in this, by punishments and rewards in that. On this hypothesis alone they insist : and therefore, if this will not serve their turn, God is disowned by them as effectually, as if he was so in terms.

HEATHEN legislators might have reason to add the terrors of another life to those of the judgments of God, and of the laws of man, in this. Heathen priests might have reason to support these

these opinions by the authority of their pretended revelations, and by the mysterious rites of religion. But what reason could theists have, at any time, to pass condemnation on the whole scheme of God's providence as it is exercised in this world, in order to confirm an opinion, by reason, that must stand on the bottom of revelation, or on none? On this bottom it would spread, and prevail as far, and as much, as the revelation itself. We see that it does so both in Christianity and in Mahometanism. On this bottom it would do some good most certainly, and it could do no hurt. The mischief lies in the way of proof. Reason establishes the belief of an all-perfect Being. Revelation supposes it. If we impute any imperfection to this Being, we shake the belief of him. The imputation implies contradiction, and reason is set in opposition to reason. But, on the other hand, some things may be admitted piously, on the faith of a revelation, concerning which we can scarce attempt to reason without impiety. Thus we may believe that men are to live again in another state, and that they will be dealt with there, even with some regard to the use they have made of their free-will here. But to enforce this hypothesis by any attempts to prove that the dispensations of providence here are unjust, or to advance any thing concerning the assumed future state, which cannot be reconciled to the divine perfections, is impious and absurd. It is impious and absurd, therefore, to rest the demonstrated existence of an all-perfect Being on an hypothesis
that

that imputes real injustice to him hereafter, as an expedient to screen him from the imputation of imaginary injustice here : and the divines who do this, if they are not atheists, which it is reasonable as well as charitable to believe that none of them are, must be esteemed abettors at least of atheism, by every man who examines impartially their whole proceeding.

LXVII.

METAPHYSICAL writers counsel us sometimes very gravely to silence imagination, that we may attend to experience, and hearken to the voice of reason. The advice is good : and they would neither puzzle themselves, nor perplex knowledge, if they took it as they give it. But who can forbear smiling, when these very men abandon themselves, at the same instant, to all the seductions and to all the transports of their own imaginations ? No men do so more than these, not even the persons of your own tribe : and as many of their writings, from those of PLATO down to some that are very modern, might pass more justly for poems, than for philosophical treatises, so was I not in the wrong when I advised you to suppose rather that BARNEVELT or SCRIBLERUS had proved your Rape of the lock to be a philosophical, than to suppose they had proved it to be a political, poem. These philosophers are so afraid of ignorance, that they expose themselves to error, which is worse. What they imagine presumptuously

ously may be, they pass dogmatically for that which is, in matters of the first philosophy above all. You carry on your poetical systems “per ambages” “deorumque ministeria:” and, for this purpose, no other being can be so like to man, as a poetical god; nor any intricacies of your marvellous so great, as those of imaginary abstractions, imaginary analogies, and delusive sounds, which these men employ to carry on theirs. It is hard very often to discover their meaning, or even whether they have any meaning or no: and when we examine closely what is intelligible in their writings, we find it sometimes hard, and sometimes impossible, to reconcile clearly and consistently many things that they advance in maintenance of the same system, and in a supposed conformity to it.

THIS world is called, by some, the porch or entrance into another. We go from the porch into the house by death; for death does not destroy that soul, that self, which is the living agent. It destroys, indeed, the gross material body: or, to speak in the familiar sublime of SOCRATES, the soul wears out her suit of cloaths*. Nay, she was said to wear out so many, in different states, both before and after this, that there was some apprehension taken lest she should wear out herself at last. They who assert a future, as well as the present, life, connect the two, in some of their discourses, so intimately together, that they assume the moral government of God, which begins in one, to be

* Vid. PHAED. in PLATO.

carried on more perfectly, and to be complete, in the other. Thus virtue has a sufficient sphere of action, and all the consequences of it have time to follow. Good men may all unite with one another, and with other orders of virtuous creatures, and form one blessed society in a future state: nay, this happy effect of virtue, in distant scenes and periods, may have a tendency to amend those vicious creatures, throughout the universal kingdom of God, who are capable of amendment*. They who express themselves in this manner, who think that virtue is militant here, and may be and is often overborne, but that it may combat with greater advantage hereafter, and prevail completely, and enjoy its consequent rewards in some future state, tho they think the present a state of probation and trial, cannot think it to be such finally. But the language of divines, in general, is different. Tho they are not quite agreed about the eternity of torments in hell, yet they are agreed that our state of probation ends with this life; that however we are disposed of from the hour of death to the day of judgment, that judgment will be determined by what we have done in this state; and that the exact distribution of rewards and punishments then made, will, and alone can, set the present disorders and inequalities right, and justify on the whole that scheme of providence †, which appears in the small portion

* Vid. Anal. of relig. P. i. c. 3.

† Vid. CLARKE'S Evid. Prop. iv.

of it, that we see, so inexplicable, so confused and so unworthy of infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness.

THE first of these theological hypotheses, for such they are to reason, independently of revelation, one as much as the other, may be received. Far from accusing directly, and excusing indirectly, the providence of God, it does not so much as imply any thing repugnant to the perfections of the divine nature. I do not presume to say, that these perfections require it should be true, nor that my understanding is able fully to comprehend it. But since I may believe it true, tho I cannot believe the latter to be so without contradicting the fundamental principles of theism, I embrace with joy the pleasing expectations it raises in my mind. The antient and modern Epicureans provoke my indignation, when they boast, as a mighty acquisition, their pretended certainty that the body and the soul die together *. If they had this certainty then, would the discovery be so very comfortable? When I consult my reason, I am ready to ask these men, as TULLY asked their predecessors, where that old doating woman is who trembles at the acherontia templa, the alta orci, and all the infernal hobgoblins, furies with their snakes and whips, devils with their cloven feet and lighted torches? Was there need of so much philosophy to keep these mighty genii from living under the same terrors? I would ask further, is the middle

* Se, cum tempus mortis venisset, totos esse perituros.

between atheism and superstition so hard to find? Or may not these men serve as examples to prove what PLUTARCH affirms, “that superstition leads “to atheism?” For me, who am no philosopher, nor presume to walk out of the high road of plain common sense *, but content myself to be governed by the dictates of nature, and am, therefore, in no danger of becoming atheistical, superstitious, or sceptical, I should have no difficulty which to chuse, if the option was proposed to me, to exist after death, or to die whole, as it has been called. Be there two worlds, or be there twenty, the same God is the God of all, and wherever we are, we are equally in his power. Far from fearing my Creator, that all-perfect Being whom I adore, I should fear to be no longer his creature.

LXVIII.

HAVING said thus much to shew why the first of these hypotheses, which I am willing to admit may be true, tho it has no foundation in scripture or reason, and is purely imaginary; it remains that I shew more at large why the last, which I reject on principles of reason, must be on those principles necessarily false. When divines abandon the strongholds of revelation, wherein they are, or should be, made secure, they have no right to expect submission out of their province; and they must be content, when they reason profanely or absurdly, to be sent back to revelation.

* Introd. to Princ. of hum. knowledge.

It is profane even to insinuate, and much more to affirm peremptorily, that the proceedings of God towards man in the present life are unjust: and if that could be admitted, it would be absurd to admit that this may be set right; which means, if the words have any meaning, that this injustice must cease to be injustice, on the received hypothesis of his proceedings towards man in another life. One is profane, notwithstanding all the questions they beg to support the charge. The other is absurd, on the very principles on which they argue, and according to our clearest and most distinct ideas or notions of human justice.

THAT a due proportion of reward and punishment, that reparation and terror, are objects essential to the constitution of human justice, will not be denied. That which falls short of these is partial: that which goes beyond them cruel. Men are liable to err on both sides: God on neither. Men may have, therefore, amends to make; God never can: and when we say amends have been made, we imply that injustice has been committed. Now, as absurd as it appears to say this when we speak of the proceedings of God towards good men in the other life, we must say it, for we have nothing else to say, if we assume that he has dealt unjustly by them in this life; since it is beyond omnipotence to cause that, which has been done, not to have been done. The happy state of good men in heaven, according to this bold hypothesis, is not so much the reward of
the

the virtue they practised on earth, as an act of God's justice against himself, as it were; an act, in short, by which he makes them reparation, and an ample one it is, for the injustice he did them here. The miserable state of wicked men in hell is an exercise of justice delayed, but exercised so severely at last, that it would exceed vastly all the necessary degrees of terror, if any of these creatures remained after it in an undetermined condition wherein terror might have it's effect.

THO reparation and terror are the essential objects of justice in the punishment of crimes, yet it is not sufficient that they be made so in general only. Justice requires that punishments, and we must say the same of rewards, the two sanctions of all laws, be measured out in various degrees and manners, according to the various circumstances of particular cases, and in a due proportion to them. Such is the procedure of providence in the moral government of the world: for tho particular interpositions to reward or punish particular men, if there are any, are too rare and too conjectural to pass for rules and measures of his government, and tho it be apparent that the immediate regard of providence is directed to men collectively, not individually; yet the divine wisdom has provided means to punish individuals, by directing men to form societies, and to establish laws, in the execution of which civil magistrates are in some sort the vicegerents of providence. To them distributive justice is committed, and when this fails

fails to have it's effect, when the immorality of individuals becomes that of a whole society, then the judgments of God follow: and as men are regarded collectively, they are punished collectively, in the order of a general providence. This is evidently the economy of God's government of mankind in this life. That which it is assumed will take place hereafter, and according to which he will proceed eternally in another life, is the very reverse of this. Every individual human creature is to be tried by the Son of God, that is by God himself, at the great day, in the valley of Jehosaphat. The criminal, who has been justified here, will be condemned there. The innocent man, who has been condemned here, will be justified there. The most secret actions, nay the thoughts of every heart, will be laid open, and sentence will be pronounced accordingly. What now does that justice require, if it may be called justice, when it tends neither to reparation nor terror, on the principles of which we argue? It requires most certainly that rewards and punishments should be measured out, in every particular case, in proportion to the merit and demerit of each individual. But, instead of this, it is assumed, conformably to the christian revelation and to the doctrine of PLATO, that the righteous are set on the right hand of the judge, and the wicked on the left, from whence they are transported to heaven, or plunged into hell. They are tried individually; they seem to be rewarded or punished collectively, without any distinction of the parti-

cular cases which have been so solemnly determined, and without any proportion observed between the various degrees of merit and demerit, of innocence and of guilt, in the application of these rewards and punishments.

I ASK the men who maintain that justice is the same in God as it is in our ideas of it, and who presume, on these ideas, to censure the divine providence when they see such as they esteem good involved sometimes in public calamities with such as they esteem wicked, whether this be a jot more repugnant to their ideas of justice, and of the moral fitness of things, whereon they insist so much, than it is to reward the greatest and the least degree of virtue, and to punish the greatest and the least degree of vice, alike? The particular rules of justice consist in the distinction and proportion that have been mentioned; and unless they are preserved, the general rules must be of course perverted. I ask what these persons would say, if they beheld a man, who had done some trifling good to society, recompensed like one who had saved his country; or if they, who were convicted of petty larceny, should be delivered over to the hangman, at one of our sessions, with those who had been found guilty of assassination and robbery? It may be said of eternal torments in hell, that they have been made known to us by revelation; that there are, no doubt, sufficient reasons for them, which we are as unable to discover as we were to discover that there would be any such torments;

ments; but that these reasons not having been revealed, it is in vain to enquire about them, or about the various degrees of beatitude and of misery, wherewith good men may be rewarded, and ill men punished, in another life. Now this answer is certainly conclusive on the hypothesis of a revelation; and being so, it should have hindered those divines, who maintain this eternity, from attempting it on arbitrary suppositions, and on such frivolous reasonings as are not only unworthy of infinite wisdom, but even of common sense in a very low degree, what reputation soever the authors of them have had in theology. How comes it to pass now, that the first of these divines account for an eternity of torments, and would, and might as well, account for the apparently unjust equality of rewards to all the good, and of punishments to all the wicked, in another world, on the reasonable supposition that the proceedings of providence are righteous and just, tho determined by reasons incomprehensible to us; and will not suffer themselves to be silenced by the same answer, when they clamor against the justice of the same providence because good men are sometimes unhappy, and ill men happy, in the present world? With what front can the last of these divines insist on all the trifling reasons they bring to reconcile an eternity of torments to the goodness and justice of an all-perfect Being, or may bring to shew that the foolish paradox of the Stoics and the bloody laws of DRACO are agreeable to these attributes, whilst they reject the arguments, that are drawn from

what God has done in the constitution of the human nature, against what they assume that he designed to do?

If acts of goodness and mercy, carried to excess, may become instances of weakness, or of something worse; if acts of severity may become, in the same manner, instances of cruelty; if the bounds of the former are limited by the proportion necessary to encourage the virtuous, and to excite the vicious, who are capable of it, to amendment; if those of the latter are limited by the proportion necessary to make reparation, and imprint terror on the minds of men; if it be arbitrary and tyrannical to make no distinction of persons in dissimilar, as it is partial to make this distinction in similar, cases; if all this be agreeable to the clearest and most distinct ideas and notions we are able to frame of justice and equity; and if we are to judge of the conduct of God's providence in another world by these, as we must be, if we are to judge by these of the conduct of his providence in this world: if all this be so, I have a right to conclude that they, who impute imaginary injustice to God here, impute very real injustice to him hereafter; and that it is impossible to believe that such a man as CLARKE, to instance no other, could be in earnest when he affirmed that an exact distribution of rewards and punishments would be made, by this hypothesis, in a future state, and that such a scheme of providence would appear worthy of infinite goodness and justice, as well

well as wisdom. He forgot, when he asserted this, or he hoped his readers would forget, what he had asserted in another place, by which he deprived himself of the usual evasion, that he and all his tribe employ whenever they assume that God says, or does, any thing that it is impossible to reconcile to the divine perfections. He could have no recourse to the incomprehensibility of God's judgments on this occasion. He had asserted that the moral attributes are the same in God, as they are in our ideas. On this theological, for it is nothing less than a theistical, principle, he had joined in the common cry against the irregularities, inequalities, and disorders of this world, on which the charge of injustice against the providence of God is founded. To make this good, he appeals to human understanding. He appeals then to the same understanding, to the same ideas and notions, for the truth and sufficiency of the hypothesis, by which all that is amiss here is to be set right, and the divine providence is to be justified on the whole. If the truth and sufficiency of it to this purpose cannot be so made out, the cause of God is evidently betrayed by these men. They plead most strenuously against his justice, and they seem to plead booty for it.

To assume that the conduct of divine providence towards mankind in this world has one criterion, and in the next world another, would be too extravagant. God is the same, his attributes are the same, he can act against them in neither: and if

we are competent to judge what they require of him in one, we are competent to judge what they require of him in both. Concerning his dispensations of both, therefore, we may argue on our general or abstract notions of human justice, when we defend his providence against the accusations, and even the pretended justifications, of it by such a writer as CLARKE, who, like another EUNOMIUS, presumes to know God, his moral nature at least, and to teach others to know him, as well as he knows himself. In arguing with other divines, who are less presumptuous, for some such there are who do not pretend to reduce the whole economy of God's dispensations within the comprehension of human reason, we have another rule, sufficient to combat this hypothesis, and to secure us from error; one part of which they follow readily, and the other part of which they are obliged, like the rest of their brethren, to evade in particular instances, tho none of them dare to reject it avowedly and in general. The rule, I mean, is this: first, that we adore the Supreme Being in all his works, and in all the known proceedings of his providence, without assuming any postulata on the strength of our own reason, which are neither confirmed, nor evidently suggested, by them, and which may be set in opposition to the wisdom, goodness, or justice of this Being by dogmatical reasoners a priori. Secondly, that we admit no proposition to be true, nor any argument valid, which expresses or implies, on what authority soever, the least conceivable imperfection in God. As to the first, the di-

vines

vines we speak of here practise it very laudably when they refuse to raise the importance of man, and the benevolence of God towards him, so high, as to affirm, like the others, that he is the final cause of the world, and that the happiness God was desirous to communicate to him was the final cause of his creation; when they take away these principal foundations of the accusations brought against providence, and shew the accusations themselves to be made up of exaggeration and false representation. As to the second, neither their case, nor their conduct, is the same. In the character of philosophers they are under no necessity of maintaining this hypothesis, nor obliged to excuse that providence they never accused. But in the character of divines they are under this necessity, and their profession obliges them to defend every part of the system it was instituted to defend. They defend it, therefore: and they find the task of doing so in concert with their brethren much harder, than that of defending the cause of God against their brethren and the atheists in alliance, by shewing that there is more good than evil in this world, and that the happiness of mankind is provided for sufficiently in it.

LXIX.

IF the immortality of the soul could be proved by physical arguments, the eternity of rewards and punishments would be no necessary corollary deducible from it. But this immortality is a con-

sequence necessarily deducible from this eternity. This immortality, therefore, seems to rest on a moral proof, and an inverted order of reasoning, since, if the justice of God requires that there should be a state of eternal rewards and punishments, the soul of man is immortal, certainly; and the same persons, who were virtuous or vicious here, must receive their retribution there. To conceive this personal identity, which is ascertained by our consciousness, and which is known as intuitively as our existence in the present, and must be so in the future state, unless we drink of the water of Lethe by the way, is not difficult surely: and it may be matter of surprise to observe how many scruples have been raised concerning it by men who seem to embrace the rest of this doctrine without any. The rest of this doctrine is, however, as inconceivable as this part of it is plain: and whether we suppose that it was derived from an opinion of the immortality of the soul, or that this opinion was derived from it, neither way will it stand the test of reason; for in one case it is founded originally on mere imagination, or on physical and metaphysical proofs that are insufficient; and, in the other, the opinion of the soul's immortality is founded originally on moral proofs that are precarious, to say no worse of them yet.

It is said that this opinion was brought into Greece first by PHERECYDES of Syros. But the doctrine of future rewards and punishments had been brought thither long before. It is indeed far
more

more probable that this opinion and this doctrine were imported together by ORPHEUS, and other antient poets; tho the master of PYTHAGORAS might be the first who wrote in prose on these, or on any philosophical subject. But, however this was, it is obvious enough that they, who believed the immortality of the soul, and future rewards and punishments in another life, did not believe an eternity of torments to be the common fate of the wicked. The priests had reasons of private, as well as of public, interest to increase these terrors; and yet in days of the blindest superstition they tried to reconcile them, by several softenings, to the justice of God, and to the belief of men. The whole mythology of the other world was so absurd, and so confused in itself, and it is come down to us in so many dark and inconsistent reports, that the learned attempt in vain to make out any coherent system of it. Thus much however we know, that whilst the pagans installed in the choir of the gods some men, whose sepulchres were to be seen on earth, for the good or great actions they had done in their generations, “*viros claros et fortes* *,” and bestowed on these a sort of sedentary immortality, they held that there was a middle state, wherein they who were neither good enough for heaven, nor bad enough for hell, the “*animae sanabiles*” of PLATO, should be purged, and their state of probation, as it were, lengthened. This purgatory your church has borrowed: but the heathen divines applied the belief of it to a

* TULLY.

very theistical purpose, to justify the providence of God in his dealings with men; and your church has made use of this belief to a very mercenary purpose, to bubble the laity, and to enrich the priesthood. We know further that the system of a metempsychosis, according to which the persons, who existed in the human state, had pre-existed, and would exist again, after they went out of this, in others; and that the several ranks and orders of beings in heaven, as well as the several degrees and kinds of punishment in hell, were invented to answer the objections that were made to the government of God in this world, and that might be made to the economy of the same government in the next; if it was assumed that all those, who did not deserve to be damned at their going out of this life for what they had done in it, were saved alike; and that all those, who did not deserve to be saved, were damned at the same time in a lump. These hypotheses, and others of the same sort, were very extravagant no doubt; but still they were well intended. They afforded answers at least as good as the objections made to the dispensations of providence in this life; and they rendered those of the same providence in another life less repugnant to the notions of justice.

How great this repugnancy is, and how much reason there is to apprehend that it should destroy little by little, among men who reason for themselves and are not stupidly implicate, all those impressions which the belief of a future state is so usefully

usefully designed to give ; rather than to hope that the received hypothesis should fortify these impressions, or even preserve them on the minds of such men ; two observations will help to shew : one of which cannot be contradicted, and the other of which is so easily proved, that, like self-evident propositions, which admit of no proof, it scarce requires any. That which cannot be contradicted is this. As much as christian divines are hampered by some expressions in holy writ, there are those among them who appear very evidently to have disbelieved the eternity of the torments of hell ; for it is too little to say that they doubted about them, or seemed to oppose them : and these are men who bow to none in superiority of parts and learning. Such too there were in the church of old. That which scarce requires any proof is this. They who maintain this eternity are reduced to employ such arbitrary assumptions, such inconsistency in what they advance, and such futility of argument, as they would reproach severely to others, and be ashamed to employ themselves on any subject that was not theological. The writings of these men are in every hand : and I dare appeal to you, whether you can force your inward sense to admit that eternal torments in another life are consistent with any notions of justice you are able to frame, either because every sin is an offence against an infinite Being, and therefore deserves infinite punishment, as if every offence was to be punished, not according to the degree of it, but in proportion to the dignity of the lawgiver ; or because
these

these torments may be a warning to the heathen, whose state of probation may be extended beyond this life, and must be extended, to make this argument good, beyond the consummation of all things; or finally, for it would be tedious and useless to mention any more, because the damned may grow mad and not feel their misery, or grow fond of it; in which case, if it was not cruel, it would be absurd, to continue their punishments.

COMPARE the greatest human virtue you can imagine, exposed to all the calamities of life during a term of fifty or threescore years, and recompensed with happiness which exceeds vastly in every instance of it, as much as in it's duration, the sum total of all these calamities, that is, with happiness infinite and eternal. Compare the greatest human wickedness you can imagine, accompanied with an uninterrupted unmingled affluence of every thing which can go to the constitution of human felicity during the same number of years, and after that punished in a state of excessive and never-ending torments. What proportion, in the name of God, will you find between the virtue and the recompence, between the wickedness and the punishment? One of these persons has amends made to him beyond all conceivable degrees of a just reparation. The other has punishment inflicted on him beyond all conceivable degrees of a necessary terror. Again. Suppose two men of equal virtue, but of very opposite fortunes in this life; the one extremely happy, the other as unhappy during

during the whole course of it. Are these men recompensed alike in the next? If they are, there arises such a disproportion of happiness in favor of one of these virtuous men, as must appear inconsistent with justice, and can be imputed to nothing but partiality, which theism will never impute to the Supreme Being, whatever artificial theology may do, and does in many instances. Are these two men not recompensed alike? Has one of them a greater, and the other a less, share of happiness in that heaven to which they both go? If this be said and allowed, the same disproportion, nay, a disproportion infinitely greater, will remain. The difference must be made by the degree, it cannot be made by the duration, of this happiness, which both of them are to enjoy eternally. Now any degree of happiness the more, tho never so small, enjoyed eternally, will exceed infinitely not only all the happiness of earth, but all that of heaven which can be enjoyed in any determined number of years. If you suppose two persons of equal guilt, one of whom has been as happy as a wicked man can be, and the other of whom has suffered as much misery in this life as a wicked man can be thought to deserve; the same reasoning will hold good: the disproportion of punishments in one case will be like the disproportion of rewards in the other; and that justice, which is said to be the same in God as in our ideas, will be acquitted in neither. A divine, pressed by such arguments, might have recourse for aught I know, to something like that balance, wherein it was said
that

that WOLLASTON affected to weigh happiness and misery even to grains and scruples, in order to assume that the additional degrees of happiness in heaven, and of misery in hell, cease as soon as the account between the two worlds is made even, and the disproportion taken away; after which the two good men and the two wicked men remain, in the different states allotted to them, on an equal foot. This might be said by one accustomed to make hypotheses at random, and without any other rule than his want of them, but I cannot think it would deserve a serious answer.

LXX.

SOMETHING else may be said, that will appear more reasonable at first, and that will be found, on examination, only to set the injustice of the assumed future dispensations of providence in a still stronger light. It may be said that altho such proportions, as I have mentioned, are included in our notions of justice, strictly taken; yet rewards and punishments do often exceed these strict bounds, without being deemed repugnant to justice, and marks of weakness, or of cruelty, in him who bestows them, or inflicts them. This now is true in certain degrees, and in certain circumstances, according to which these degrees are to be regulated. Excessive mercy may be vicious, as well as excessive severity, in the judgments of men; and they must be excessive when the particular proportions in which they are measured out exceed
by

by far what is necessary to encourage the good, and to terrify the wicked, the two general objects of justice. The bounds of human justice are straiter or larger, but still it has bounds; and whenever the former are transgressed, the circumstance which justifies this transgression must be some public good. Such is the nature of human justice, according to which we are to judge of divine justice in our disputes with these men, who say that they are the same.

For my part, who do not think that they are the same in such a sense, as to make us adequate judges of one as well as of the other, I could easily persuade myself, if I admitted this hypothesis, that the mercy and goodness of God stand as it were on one side of his justice, that his mercy pardons the offenders, who amend, consistently with his justice; for else, as all men offend, all men would be punished; and that his goodness may carry on the work his mercy has begun, and place such as are the objects of both in a state where they will be exempt perhaps eternally from all natural, and, as much as finite creatures can be, from moral, evil. I could persuade myself that they who are objects of neither, and are not therefore pardoned, remain, if they do remain, secluded from the happiness of the others, and reduced to a forlorn state. Some such hypothesis, where no certainty is to be had, I could admit as probable, because it contradicts none of the divine attributes, sets none of them at variance, nor breaks their harmony: for
tho

tho I fear to pronounce what God will do, and am always astonished at the boldness of those who pronounce not only what he will do, but what he ought to do; yet I think myself obliged, among the various opinions that are, or may be, entertained of the divine proceedings, to embrace as probable, if I embrace any, that and that alone which comes nearest to the best notions I can frame of moral perfection. It is not possible for me, therefore, to conceive any attributes standing on the other side of God's justice. No attribute can hold that place, unless cruelty be a divine attribute; which it would be blasphemous to suppose, tho the Jews, and some other barbarous people, have supposed it to be so.

To reform offenders is neither the sole, nor the principal, end of punishments. Those of an inferior kind may have this intention. Those that are capital must have some other: and it would be too ridiculous to make the hangman, who executes a criminal, pass for the reformer of his manners. The criminal is executed for the sake of others, and that he, who did much hurt in his life, may not only be deprived of the power of doing any more, but may do some good too by the terror of his death. If a prince, or a magistrate, tortured and put to death clandestinely, without regard to reparation or terror, even such as deserved capital punishment, he would be deemed a tyrant; because the principal end of punishment is not obtained by this proceeding: and

and such a prince, or magistrate, could have no motive to punish, but the pleasure of punishing; which no spirit, but that of anger, vengeance, and cruelty, can inspire. A spirit of justice punishes; but the judge who has no other spirit, punishes with regret. If these notions are true, and surely they are true, how can any one, who believes that God is an all-perfect Being, believe at the same time that he does what would deserve the highest censure among his imperfect creatures? None but those who accuse him of injustice in this life, can believe him so unjust in the next. They make him more unjust, than the prince or magistrate would be in the case that has been supposed. If the torments of hell take place before the consummation of all things, he is as unjust as this prince or magistrate. But if sentence is not pronounced, nor judgment executed, till then, he is infinitely more so. Clandestine punishments may have some of the effects of justice, and may contribute in some degree to the reformation of men, or at least to the good of society, by putting out of it such as are hurtful to it. But what effect of this kind can further punishments have, when the system of human government is at an end, and the state of probation over; when there is no further room for reformation of the wicked, nor reparation to the injured by those who injured them; in fine, when the eternal lots of all mankind are cast, and terror is of no further use?

You will say perhaps, for it is commonly said,
 VOL. V. L that

that altho it be too late, after the consummation of all things, or of the system of this world at least, to obtain the ends of human justice, yet the divine justice remains to be satisfied ; and that this cannot be satisfied unless every human creature, who has sinned beyond all measure of pardon here, be punished eternally hereafter. Can this now be urged by any one, who has assumed that divine and human justice are the same, and that God appeals to man for the equity of his proceedings ; or indeed by any one else ? Sure I am, it cannot be so, consistently, by the former, nor reasonably by the latter : for tho it may be said, to soften this bold assumption, that justice is truly the same in God as it is in our ideas, but that, God being infinitely superior to man, an extreme difference must needs arise, in the exercise and particular applications of it, between divine and human justice ; yet this will appear to be an evasion in the present case, and not an answer. A prince, or a magistrate, may do, no doubt, very justly, nay, it is essential to justice that he should do, what would be unjust and criminal in a private man. The rank he holds, and the power with which he is invested, give him this right : but neither superior rank, nor superior power, can give him a right to pervert justice, nor to act in opposition to those laws of the society which ought to be the rules of his conduct. Thus the Supreme Being, whose majesty, wisdom, and power, are elevated far above all our conceptions, may do justly, in a multitude of instances, what princes, and

and magistrates, have no more the right, than the power, of doing. But then we may presume to say, that there is this similitude between the two cases. Tho the right and power of the Supreme Being are not delegated, they may be limited like theirs. This I mean : They are limited, if we believe certain divines, by eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things independent on him, according to which he regulates his conduct, and all rational beings are obliged to regulate theirs, because all rational beings are capable of knowing them. But if we reject this doctrine, as, I think, we ought to do, and not without horror, we must be convinced, however, that the Author of all nature, in constituting our system, constituted certain specific physical and moral natures, according to which he governs the world : from whence it will follow that the reasons, on which his providence acts in the present system of things, may be known to us in some instances, and must be unknown to us in others ; whilst the whole economy of any future system must be absolutely impenetrable. We are able to account, in great measure, for the general distribution of good and evil here, tho not perhaps for every particular instance. But we are wholly unable to say what will happen hereafter. This only we know, that neither here, nor hereafter, God will deal with his creatures in direct violation of those natures and essences of things which he himself has constituted, and has given them the means of knowing. He will not deal with them according to one rule here, and according to another hereafter.

As we must believe, if we think worthily of the Supreme Being, that he will not proceed with his human creatures, in any state, in violation of that justice which he has constituted in the nature of things, and whereof he has made them able to acquire ideas and notions; so we must be on our guard, lest we should be induced to believe that he will proceed, at any time, agreeably to those affections and passions which have so great a share in directing our conduct, and so much influence over our thoughts. Sovereign reason is exempt from affection and passion; and the great cause of error in theism is this, we judge of it with all our affections and passions about us. What the effects of this cause were in the heathen world, we all know. But few of us consider that the same cause has worked ever since, works still, and, if it does not produce a crop of errors as foul and as abominable as those, it produces a crop not less abundant.

LXXI.

WHATEVER the vulgar religion of the heathen taught, their philosophers, even those of them who assumed providence to be the most active in directing the affairs of this world, were unanimous in their opinion, that the Supreme Being was never angry, nor ever did harm*. The first

* Num iratum timemus JOVEM? At hoc quidem commune est omnium philosophorum . . . nunquam nec irasci Deum, nec nocere. TULL. De off. l. iii.

part needs no commentary, the second very little. They believed that God punished in this life, but they believed that his punishments were inflicted for the general advantage of mankind ; that the evil which happened to the virtuous was designed by his goodness to try their virtue, to preserve, and to improve it by exercise ; that the evil which came on the wicked was directed by his justice, to chastise their crimes, to terrify, and reform ; and that a being, who acted always on motives of goodness and justice, could be never said with truth and propriety to do harm. Such was the language of heathen divines, and thus they represented the proceedings of God to man. But our artificial theology holds another, which is very different. Let us mention some of those doctrines which are of this kind, and begin and terminate in that which is here opposed particularly. According to them, God loves, and he hates, he is partial, angry, and revengeful. He creates some rational beings with a determination to save them, and others only to damn them. It is not sure that repentance and amendment can appease the wrath of God, nor any thing less than a sacrifice. He has given a law, the law of nature and of reason, to all his human creatures ; the sanctions of it are a natural tendency of virtue to the happiness, and of vice to the misery, of mankind : but these sanctions are so imperfect, that they cannot procure obedience to the law, even with the supplemental help of occasional interpositions on the part of God, and of a constant discipline of civil laws

on the part of man. To supply this imperfection, therefore, there must be necessarily some further sanctions of this law, and these are the rewards and punishments reserved to a future state.

HERE is ample room for reflections. I shall make but three. The term "imperfection" is, in this case, employed equivocally; for we may conceive an absolute and a relative perfection, and that which appears imperfect in one of these considerations, may be perfect in the other, according to the design of the lawgiver. We may presume to say, that if it had been in the order of God's designs to make the state of mankind as happy as the universal and steady observation of this law would make it, he would have made the sanctions of the law as perfect as the law. But we see by what he has done, which is the only sure way of knowing what he designed, that we were made to live in a state of moderate and mixed happiness. His law shews us the perfection of our nature, in which that of our happiness consists. Reason draws us to it, affections and passions from it; and our free-will, inclining sometimes to one, and sometimes to the other, maintains that state which mankind is appointed to hold in the order of rational beings. Had the sanctions of the law of nature been stronger, we should have risen above this state. Had they been weaker, we should have sunk below it. Thus they are relatively perfect, relatively to the design of the lawgiver: and neither the goodness, nor the

the justice, of God required that we should be made better, nor happier, than we are.

BUT, further, if we will suppose any other sanctions necessary to enforce the original and universal law of God, the law of our nature, they cannot be those of a future state. Future rewards and punishments are sanctions of the evangelical, as temporal were of the mosaical, law. Sanctions must be contained in the law, they must be a part of it. In their promulgation they must precede, as the law does, necessarily all acts of obedience, or disobedience to it; tho in their execution they are retrospective to these acts, and are the consequences of them. So likewise new sanctions may be added to an old law by the same authority that made it. But justice requires that the new be as public as the old, and that the authority of them be as well ascertained to every one who is bound by the law. These conditions are essential, there can be no sanction without them: and therefore the rewards and punishments of a future state, which have not these conditions, are no sanctions of the natural law. Reason and experience, that taught men this law, shewed them the sanctions of it. But neither of them pointed out these. Have we any grounds to believe that they were known to the antediluvian world? Do they stand at the head or tail of the seven precepts given to the sons of NOAH? Were they so much as mentioned by MOSES, who had need of every sanction, that his knowledge, or his imagination,

could suggest, to govern the unruly people to whom he gave a law in the name of God? Were they believed, was that of future punishments, at least, believed, by any of the philosophers of Greece? PYTHAGORAS told strange stories, indeed, of the infernal regions, where he had been in his several transmigrations from body to body; and PLATO had his informations from ERUS the Pamphylian, who came back like a messenger sent on purpose to give an account of this new discovered world. But were they in earnest? It would be ridiculous to think that they were. Both of them affected to be lawgivers; and it is no wonder that in this character they employed an hypothesis, which other lawgivers had employed with success in those eastern nations with which they were acquainted.

FROM such religions, from such philosophy, and from such political institutions, the Jews, who picked up many scraps of all these among the Egyptians and their neighbours in the east, introduced the doctrine of future rewards and punishments into their own, soon after the captivity of Babylon at least. But whenever they introduced it, this doctrine was not of their own growth most certainly. It was not derived from their original revelation: and accordingly it was not received by that sect who adhered strictly to the law. Thus we see that this assumed double sanction, far from being coeval with the law of nature, or any positive law of God, was unknown long to the nations

tions who lived under the former, and even to his chosen people who lived under the latter ; and that when it was known, and wherever it was known, it was plainly of human, not of divine, authority.

My third reflection is this. As the double sanction of rewards and punishments in a future state was in fact invented by men, it appears to have been so by the evident marks of humanity that characterise it. The notions whereon it is founded are taken rather from the defects, than the excellencies, of the human nature, and favour more of the human passions, than of justice or prudence ; for *SENECA* said very consistently, tho *PLATO*, whom he quotes, very inconsistently, “ *nemo prudens punit quia peccatum est, sed ne* “ *peccetur.*” How worthily soever some philosophers might think of the Supreme Being in this, and in other respects, who did not believe that God spared the wicked in this world in opposition to his justice, that they might have an apparent reason to give for his punishment of them in another world in opposition to his mercy and justice both ; the vulgar heathen believed their *JUPITER*, as well as their inferior divinities, liable to so many human passions, that they might be easily induced to believe him liable, in his government of mankind, to those of love and hatred, of anger and vengeance. They might attribute these to him in his public, as well as the others in his private, capacity ; for, according to them,
he

he acted in both: and it is hard to say which of these passions could be attributed to him with greater irreverence. The Jews indeed, as often as they made God descend from heaven, and as much as they made him reside on earth, were far from cloathing him with corporeity, and imputing corporeal vices to him. But the very first, and almost every other, point of their theology, history, and tradition, shewed him in two other capacities, one not so shocking as what the heathens imputed to JUPITER in one capacity, but little less irreverent; for the Creator of all things, the one Supreme Being, was at the same time, according to all these, the tutelary local deity of a family, and a nation, with whom he entered into covenants that bound him and them mutually. I need to descend into no further particulars. They are enough known, and extremely suitable to the first principle of this system, which contains such instances of partiality in love, and hatred, of furious anger, and unrelenting vengeance, in a long series of arbitrary judgments, and bloody executions, as no people on earth, but this, would have ascribed, I do not say to God, but to the worst of those monsters who are suffered, or sent, by God, for a short time, to punish the iniquity of men. Is it any matter of wonder now, that the greatest part of a people trained up in such notions of the Supreme Being, and of his arbitrary government here, should be disposed to receive a heathenish doctrine, which taught nothing more arbitrary, tho a little more cruel, of his proceedings

ings hereafter? Is it any matter of wonder that they, who believed God inflicted punishments to the third and fourth generation on innocent persons, should believe that he punished offenders themselves eternally; if even they did not soften this severity by a metempsychosis, or some other way which I do not well remember, nor think it worth my while to examine?

THIS doctrine was in vogue in the church of MOSES when that of JESUS began. The Sadducees declined, the Pharisees flourished; and the great systematizer of christianity was himself a Pharisee. He, who insists so signally on an arbitrary exercise of the power of God, might have established very consistently this doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments, by his gospel, if it had been established by no other. But it was part of the original revelation: and how absurd soever it might be in the Jews to take it from the Gentiles, who had taught it without either reason or revelation to authorise them, it might seem reasonable to the Christians to adopt it. When the Jews assumed it on the faith of idolatrous and superstitious people, they added a new sanction to an old law. When the Christians adopted it, they received the new law, and the new sanction together, on the faith of the same revelation. Thus one objection to the doctrine was prevented, and every man, who entered into the new covenant, knew this condition of it before hand. But the other objections remained still in force; and, on the whole,

whole, it was found so impossible to reconcile this sanction of eternal punishments to the divine attributes, and these future invisible judgments of God to the actual proceedings of his providence, that in the early days of christianity it was rejected by some not inferior to any in knowledge or in zeal.

LXXII.

THE hypothesis of a rotation of souls, out of which even the soul of CHRIST was not, I think, excepted, at least by ORIGEN, seemed preferable to this. The makers of systems saw that the general tendency of virtue to promote the happiness, and of vice to promote the unhappiness, of mankind, by which God made it the common interest of his human creatures to cultivate one, and to restrain the other, were the sole means that his infinite wisdom had ordained to this end in the ordinary course of his providence; and that, if the wicked were sometimes punished, either collectively or individually, by extraordinary interpositions real or apparent of the same providence, this happened rarely, after long forbearance, and not till the measure of iniquity was full. They saw that the mercy of God was in this manner of proceeding as conspicuous as his justice, and that both were directed to maintain such a moral state as the imperfection of human nature admitted. No wonder, then, if they found it hard to believe that the same God, who dealt thus

thus with his creatures here, dealt so differently with them hereafter ; and that he, who punished to a gracious end, the maintainance of a moral system, with measure and proportion here, punished to no end at all when this system was at an end, with inconceivable and eternal torments. They might think, according to the vulgar theological notion, that the wrath of God against sinners for what they had done in this system was not appeased when they went out of it. But they might think too, and it is plain they did think, that wrath itself could not exceed all proportion so far, as to appoint a state of eternal torments to succeed a very short state of probation. They mingled therefore some notions of justice with this of wrath, and imagined several states of probation ; that souls, for instance, were sent to inform some bodies in recompence, or punishment, of what they had done in others ; that the wicked suffered for their impurity, but that in new states of probation they would have new occasions of purification.

By some such hypotheses they endeavoured to soften a doctrine that shocked their reason, and could not be reconciled to any moral attribute, no, nor to the physical attributes of God, not to his wisdom at least. But the general tide of artificial theology ran the other way ; and time, and dogmatical affirmation established absurdity in this case, as they have done in many. Fathers and councils decreed, and Christians believed, that
the

the Supreme Being dooms almost all his rational creatures, all whom these men do not think fit to save, to eternal torments for what they have done in this life. He created them, in effect, to be eternally miserable, according to this doctrine, since the term of this life can be reckoned for nothing in an infinite duration, and yet is to decide their state to all eternity. The doctrine we speak of assumes such a proceeding necessary to satisfy divine justice; whereas in truth it can be ascribed to no principle, but that of anger, and to the revenge of a being who punishes to the full extent of his power, and merely for the pleasure of punishing, and without any regard to justice, creatures who did not offend him merely for the pleasure of offending him, creatures who had free will, and made wrong elections; creatures who might plead, for that plea the worst of them might make, if not in excuse for their crimes, yet in mitigation of their punishment, their frailties, their passions, the imperfections of their nature, and the numerous temptations to which they stood exposed.

LXXIII.

IT is justly matter of scandal, and it would be matter of surprise, to hear men, who acknowledge an all-perfect Being, and who speak with so much reverence of him on some occasions, speak of him with so little on this, and others, if we did not observe in general that foolish presumption, with which they are apt to erect themselves into the

the standard and measure of every thing ; and in particular that profane licence which the christian theology has derived from the jewish, and which divines have rendered so familiar and so habitual, that men blaspheme without knowing they blaspheme, and that their very devotion is impious. The licence, I mean, is that of reasoning and of speaking, even in common conversation, of the divine, as of the human, nature, operations, and proceedings ; sometimes with, and sometimes without, the salvo of those distinguishing epithets and forms of speech which can in very few instances distinguish enough. The jewish scriptures ascribe to God, not only corporeal appearance, but corporeal action, and all the instruments of it ; eyes to see, ears to hear, mouth and tongue to articulate, hands to handle, and feet to walk. Divines tell us, indeed, that we are not to understand all this according to the literal signification. The meaning is, they say, that God has a power to execute all those acts, to the effecting of which these parts in us are instrumental *. The literal signification is indeed abominable : and the flimsy analogical veil thrown over it is stolen from the wardrobe of EPICURUS ; for he taught that the gods had not literally bodies, but something like to bodies, “ quasi corpus : ” not blood, but something like to blood, “ quasi sanguinem †.”

* Vid. Sermon of the archbishop of Dublin, on Rom. viii. 29, 30.

† Quidni igitur similiter, says GASSENDI, fateatur esse in deo non passiones, sed quasi passiones ? atque adeo non irasci illum, sed quasi irasci ; nec teneri gratia, sed quasi teneri ?

This

This analogy, if it could be allowed, would justify in good measure your HOMER as a philosopher, for as a poet he wanted no excuse: and something of this kind has been attempted. But who is there, philosopher, or poet, except jewish and christian rabbins, that can employ in good earnest images taken from corporeal substance, from corporeal action, and from the instruments of it, to give us notions in any degree proper of God's manner of being, and of that divine inconceivable energy in which the action of God consists, and by which the natural and moral worlds were produced, and are preserved and governed? The more human they are, the less adequate they must be; and whilst they do no good one way, they do much hurt another. They cannot exalt, they must debase, our conceptions, and accustom the mind insensibly to confound divine with human ideas and notions, God with man. This happened in the case of the anthropomorphites, who imagined that God had an human body, because it was said by MOSES that he created man in his own image. So dangerous are these expressions, whose literal sense is obvious to all, whilst the analogical is understood by few, and attended to by fewer. So false is the reason given in excuse for them, that we must know God this way, or not at all. Far from making us know him better, they lead us into error. They make us unknow him, if I may so, and impose an imaginary being upon us for the true God. Other passages of the scriptures confirmed the error of the anthropomorphites;

phites ; and, if it was heretical in the christian church, it could not be deemed, one would think, very heretical by the Jews ; since they held communion with them so far, as I remember, that they ate the paschal lamb together.

THUS again, and to bring the observation quite home to the present purpose ; the same scriptures, that are so apt in many places to make those who read them represent the Supreme Being to themselves like an old man looking out of a cloud, as painters have represented him often, ascribe to him, at the same time, by the whole tenor of them, all the affections and passions which characterised the nation of the Jews, whilst they were a nation, very strongly, and which are not entirely worn out by their dispersion, and their commerce with others. God loves, according to their theology ; but he loves with a strange predilection and partiality for them, who are not certainly the most lovely of his human creatures. He loves like DEIOTARUS, a king of Galatia, who, for the sake of one son, put the rest of his children to death. He is merciful too : but his mercy is arbitrary, and depends on mere will. “ He will have mercy on “ whom he will have mercy,” and when he will have mercy : “ and whom he will, he hardens.” Even they who esteem themselves his chosen people, who, we say, have been hardened, and they say have been chastised, have waited for it these two thousand years, and wait still. Towards mankind in general his anger is often fu-

rious, his hatred inveterate, his vengeance unrelenting. But when the wicked repent of their sins, he repents sometimes of his severity. What a description now is this of an all-perfect Being? What a task have men, several of whom are great masters of reason, undertaken, when they have undertaken to reconcile such doctrines to his perfections, and to other doctrines, directly contrary to these, that are interspersed in the same books? The task is hard, indeed, but their profession made it necessary; and all the force of great learning, and of great parts, has been prostituted to conceal the ignorance, and to palliate the errors, of the most illiterate, superstitious, and absurd race of men who ever pretended to a system of things divine or human.

LXXIV.

ANALOGY is employed in this case, as it is in the other, and indeed in every case where theological paradoxes, which are not a few, are to be defended. If analogy itself, such as some divines assume and represent it, could be defended, there would be no case wherein it ought to be employed with all its force more than in this: for, surely, to impute human passions, even the worst of them, to the Supreme Being, is not further off from blasphemy, than it is to ascribe to him a corporeal form, and the sensations, and the limbs, and the actions, of a man. It is not true, tho it has been asserted, that this analogy is obvious to every one, and that no one can think on reflection that
any

any of these passions can affect literally the divine nature *. It is on the contrary as true, that a multitude of good christians, far the greatest number, believe, at this hour, that the divine nature is affected by them, as it is true that a multitude of good heathens represented to themselves their gods and goddesses, even the father of gods and men, under an human form, or conceived at least, which is much the same, that these divinities took the human nature upon them, whenever either business or pleasure called them to converse and act with the children of men. Let us not imagine that any thing is too absurd for men to believe even on reflection. Heathens, Jews, Christians, have believed the absurdities I have mentioned ; and great metaphysicians and divines have believed this of analogy †. It would be tedious to take notice of all

* Vid. Serm. supr. citat.

† The lord president of Scotland, who is no divine by profession, but something better, and more useful to society, deals however too much in divinity ; and the contagion of HUTCHINSON'S writings and conversation makes him really mad quoad hoc, for there is such a madness, notwithstanding all his sagacity, good sense, and knowledge. In that strange book, which he has writ in this delirium against TINDAL, and which I have quoted somewhere, he says very rationally, " that we ought to be amazed at the impudence of those who pretend to decide what God is or is not, and what he can or can not do, from the notions they have framed to themselves of his attributes, his nature, and perfection." But he himself affirms, in the same book, a multitude of facts relating to the Deity, and to the whole economy of divine providence, on the faith of jewish and christian reveries, and his own or his master's whimsies ; just as the others do on the faith of theirs. The censure, therefore, which

that has been said, stupidly enough by some, and not without a little air of plausible ingenuity by others, to establish this notion. I shall say no more about it, than my subject requires necessarily: and even that will be sufficient, I think, to explode a doctrine that may be turned strongly against revealed religion, and that cuts up the very root of natural.

ALL the knowledge that God has given us the means to acquire, and therefore all that he designed we should have, of his physical and moral nature and attributes, if they may be considered separately, as we are apt to consider them, and if the latter, and every thing we ascribe to these, are not to be resolved rather into the former, into his infinite intelligence, wisdom, and power; all this knowledge, I say, is derived from his works, and from the tenor of that providence, by which he

he passes on them, may be justly passed on himself, unless it can be shewn, which it never can be, that what he advances is better proved to be true in fact, than what they advance is demonstrated conformable to right reason. Type, emblem, and analogy are the common means to disguise the absurdity both of the facts and reasonings they maintain; the consequence of which is abominable: for the vulgar may very well understand literally, what is pretended to be said analogically only, of the Supreme Being, of his nature, and of his proceedings, in the Bible; since this writer asserts it to be extremely plain, that the language of the scriptures, which describes the Deity's actions, affections, and inclinations, in terms borrowed from the usage, the sentiments, and resolutions of men, is not so figurative as it is generally supposed to be, and that we ought to understand it something more literally, than reasoners are willing to allow.

governs

governs them. We see him in a reflected, not in a direct, light. But, because we cannot frame full and adequate ideas of this sort, nor answer every question impertinent curiosity may ask, will it follow that we have, properly speaking, no knowledge at all of his attributes, nor of the manner in which they are exercised? Every part of the immense universe, and the order and harmony of the whole, as far as we are able to carry our observations and discoveries, are not only conformable to our ideas or notions of wisdom and power, but these ideas or notions were impressed originally and principally by them on every attentive mind; and men were led to conclude, with the utmost certainty, that a being of infinite wisdom and power made, preserved, and governed the system. As far as we can discern, we discern these in all his works; and where we cannot discern them it is manifestly due to our imperfection, not to his. God cannot be in any instance unwise or impotent. This now is real knowledge, or there is no such thing as knowledge. We acquire it immediately in the objects themselves, in God, and in nature the work of God. We know what wisdom and power are: we know, both intuitively and by the help of our senses, that such as we conceive them to be, such they appear in the work: and therefore we know demonstratively that such they are in the worker.

WHAT then could a very respectable * writer mean, when he said, speaking of divine knowledge

* Archbishop KING, ubi supr.

and wisdom, that God must either have these, or other faculties and powers equivalent to them, and adequate to the mighty effects which proceed from them? It is plain he meant by this supposition, in a case where nothing is ascribed but what ought to be ascribed to God, to prepare the way for the same supposition in a case where he was to excuse the jewish theology, and his own, for attributing in terms to God those affections and passions, which cannot be so attributed without impiety. The archbishop would have had no need to run into these absurdities, nor any temptation to advance some strange paradoxes, that he advanced on the foundation of an assumed analogical knowledge, if he had confined himself to refute one impiety, that of the predestinarians, without attempting to excuse another. Our ideas of divine intelligence and wisdom may be neither fantastic nor false, and yet God's manner of knowing may be so different from ours, that foreknowledge, as we call it improperly, in him may be consistent with the contingency of events, altho that which we call properly foreknowledge in ourselves be not so. But he reasons about the essential natural attributes of God, as if he reasoned about those that we call moral; in which way of reasoning there is great and manifest error. The former are fixed, uniform, and specific natures, that want no equivalent; and that are certainly adequate, since the mighty effects that are produced proceed from them. They may be perceived more or less in different cases, but in no case will they vary, even
in

in appearance and in human apprehension, from what they are. Like the sun, they may appear sometimes in the full effulgence of their brightness, and sometimes behind those clouds which the eye of human reason cannot pierce. But still, like the light and heat of the sun, tho differently perceived, they will appear the same. The latter are not such fixed, uniform, specific natures to human apprehension. They are rather assumed nominal natures, not manifested by God in his government of the world as clearly and as determinately, as the physical attributes of wisdom and power are in the whole system of his works; but framed into abstract general notions by the human mind to help itself in the moral consideration of human actions, and applied to the Supreme Being that we may reason more distinctly, if not more truly, about his nature and the dispensations of his providence. We ought to attribute all conceivable perfections, without doubt, to the supreme all-perfect Being. We can never raise our conceptions of this kind too high. They will remain, after all our efforts, vastly inadequate. Nay, if we suppose them less so, or push absurdity to the utmost and suppose them adequate, yet still they will remain very insufficient criterions by which to judge in many cases, as men presume to do in all, of these perfections in the exercise of them. The reason is plain. God act according to a multitude of relations unknown to us. He acts relatively to his system, we judge relatively to ours.

INTO such opposite paradoxes are divines trans-

ported by presumptuous reasoning and whimsical refinements, whilst they pretend to teach us the knowledge of God and of heavenly things, that some of them affirm dogmatically, and without any regard to truth, which they sacrifice readily to maintain an hypothesis, that the moral attributes are in God just what they are in our inadequate, fluctuating ideas, and that God himself appeals to man for his proceeding conformably to them: and some again are so far from falling into this, that they fall into a contrary extreme, and would persuade us that the attributes of God are all alike inconceivable to us as they are in themselves, and can be known no way except by analogy; which is not to know them at all: for knowledge, which rests in analogy, stops short, and is not knowledge. The first of these opinions has done infinite hurt to all religion, and has turned it into superstition every where and in every age. The last has not been of much service to christianity, as I apprehend; and sure I am that it will leave the objection, made to the jewish scriptures on account of the images under which they represent the Supreme Being, just where they find it.

HERE let us draw one line of separation, among others, between natural and artificial theology. By that we are taught to acknowledge and adore the infinite wisdom and power of God, which he has manifested to us, in some degree or other, in every part, even the most minute, of his creation. By that too we are taught to ascribe goodness and justice

justice to him wherever he intended that we should so ascribe them, that is, wherever either his works or the dispensations of his providence do as necessarily communicate these notions to our minds, as those of wisdom and power are communicated to us in the whole extent of both. Wherever they are not so communicated, we may assume very reasonably that it is on motives strictly conformable to all the divine attributes, and therefore to goodness and justice, tho unknown to us, from whom so many circumstances, with a relation to which the divine providence acts, must be often concealed; or we may resolve all such cases into the wisdom of God, and, resigning ourselves to that, not presume to account for them morally. Thus we follow God, and pretend to have knowledge of his moral character, no further than he gives it; no further than these abstract or general notions, which we collect from the proceedings of his providence, are confirmed by the same.

LXXV.

BUT we are taught a very different lesson in the schools of artificial theology. In them all the notions of those obligations, under which men lye to one another by the constitution of their nature, are transferred to God; and an imaginary connection between his physical and moral attributes is framed by very precarious reasonings a priori; all of which are founded on that impertinent supposition, that moral fitnesses and unfitnesses

fitnesses are known, by the eternal reason of things, to all rational beings as well as to God. They go further. As God is perfect, and man very imperfect, they talk of his infinite goodness and justice as of his infinite wisdom and power, tho the latter may preserve their nature without any conceivable bounds, and the former must cease to be what they are, unless we conceive them bounded. Their nature implies necessarily a limitation in the exercise of them. Thus then the moral attributes, according to this theology, require infinitely more of God to man, than men are able, or would be obliged, if they were able, to exercise to one another; greater profusion in bestowing benefits and rewards, greater rigor in punishing offences. This whole system of God's moral obligations, or of divine ethics, being raised a priori, and not a posteriori, is a system of the duty of God to man: let the blasphemy of this expression be charged to the account of those who make it proper and necessary to be used, in order to expose their doctrine. It is a system of what he ought, or is obliged by his attributes, to do; and not a scheme of what he has done. It prescribes to God: and the dispensations of his providence are acquitted or censured as they are conformable, or not conformable, to it.

THE makers of this system have gone still further, and have attributed to the divinity not only the perfections, but the imperfections, of humanity. Superstition, improved by philosophy, succeeded that which was rude and unsystematised; and learning

learning and knowledge finished what ignorance had begun. When they saw that the constitution of things, and the order of providence, did not answer the notions of goodness and justice in all the extent, in which they thought it was fit to ascribe these notions to a Supreme Being, contrary notions stood ready to take the place of these; and, since they could not ascribe them all to one, they ascribed them to several divinities. From hence a good and an evil god, the ditheism of philosophers. From hence that universal polytheism, a principal use of which was to account for the phaenomena of nature, and for the government of the moral world. The moral characters of pagan divinities differed, like the moral characters of men: and to make these characters complete, the same passions were ascribed to both: one nation, nay one man, was favored by one god, another by another: and as there were parties on earth, there were parties in heaven. But here we must distinguish between the theology of the Jews and that of other nations. The Jews, with more inconsistency, and not less profanation, dressed up the one Supreme Being in all the rags of humanity; which composed a kind of motley character, such as foolish superstition, and mad enthusiasm alone, could ascribe to him, and such as no man, who believes him to be an all-perfect Being, can hear without horror,

THE most barbarous nations had the most barbarous deities generally, and the gods seem to have

have been civilised no faster than their adorers were, and even not so fast, nor in the same proportion: for we know by experience that superstition can maintain barbarity in religious policy among those who are the furthest from it in civil. The antient Chinese, it is said, represented the Supreme Being, the lord of heaven and earth, for so they called him, as the giver of all good *, as an object of adoration and of gratitude, to whom their emperors offered up the first-fruits of the corn they had sowed with their own hands. But the antient nations, of whom the histories and traditions with which we are better acquainted speak, represented the divine nature like that of their own tyrants. The divine favor was to be obtained by importunate supplications, by magnificent presents, and by all the external shew of service, and pomp of adulation. Their gods too, like their tyrants, were prone to anger, and hard to be appeased. Nothing less than bloody sacrifices of beasts, of men, of children, could appease them; and the notion of rendering them propitious by putting other creatures to death being established, we are not to wonder if the greatest offenders grew the most devout. In this respect they had better quarter from gods than men, tho SENECA says that it cost more to assuage the wrath of their gods, than the rage of their tyrants, “*ut sic dii placentur quem-
admodum ne homines quidem saeviunt.*”

If we would own the truth, we should be obliged

* Scien. Sin.

to own that this kind of propitiation is much more repugnant to all our notions of justice, than any of those instances of supposed injustice which divines and atheists charge on God: and yet it continued to be the constant practice of the Jews at the same time as they boast that God was their king, and relate the terrible judgments that he executed, and that they executed by his command, or with his approbation, personally on one another, and personally for their own sakes on other people. Thus they blended together at once, in the moral character of God, injustice, cruelty, and partiality. They made him an object of terror more, than of awe and reverence; and their religion was a system of the rankest superstition: for nothing can be more true than what St. AUSTIN quotes somewhere from VARRO, that they who are religious revere, and the superstitious fear, God*. The saint would have done well to have applied this true maxim to certain abominable doctrines of his own, and to have learned from an heathen to correct his own theology. But the truth is, that christianity preserved in many respects a strong tang of the spirit of judaism, as judaism had taken and incorporated, in the first institution of it, many of the rites and observances at least of Egypt: for I will not say that the legislator, who was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, took the belief of one God from the doctrine of the theban dynasty, as different in that respect

* VARRO ait, Deum a religioso vereri, a superstitioso timeri.

from the polytheism of the other Egyptians, as that of the Jews was; tho I might suspect that he did so much more reasonably, than a very able writer insinuates that the Jews might instruct other nations in the most excellent philosophy, and that natural religion was originally built on the religion revealed to them *. The ceremonies of the law of MOSES in the worship of God were retrenched; and a more inward devotion, a more reasonable service, were established: tho even this devotion and this service retained an air of that enthusiasm which prevailed among the prophets or preachers of the jewish church, on whom the Spirit of God was supposed to descend. The Supreme Being took a milder appearance several ways among Christians. His favor was confined no longer to one people; all mankind were construed, by this new theology, to be of the seed of ABRAHAM, and they were all included in the new covenant. The Messiah came: and God did for fallen man what he would not do for fallen angels, according to a remark of archbishop TILLOTSON. He sent his only Son, who is one and the same God with himself, into the world to suffer an ignominious death, and by that sacrifice to redeem all the sons of ADAM from the consequences of his wrath, which the sin of ADAM had entailed on the whole race of mankind. Christian theology discovers, in this mysterious proceeding, the love of God to man, his infinite justice and goodness. But reason will discover the fantastical,

* Vid. Def. of revealed rel. by CONYBEARE, p. 406.

confused,

confused, and inconsistent notions of jewish theology latent in it, and applied to another system of religion. This love will appear partiality as great, as that which the Jews assumed that he had shewn in preferring their nation to all the nations of the earth. This justice will appear injustice in all the circumstances of the fall, and in the redemption of man by the propitiatory sacrifice of an innocent person. This goodness will appear cruelty when it is considered that the propitiation was made by tormenting, and spilling the blood of the victim : and, in short, injustice and cruelty will appear inconsistently united in this circumstance, that mankind could not have been redeemed if the Jews had received, instead of crucifying, the Messiah ; and yet, that they were rejected then, and have been punished ever since, for not receiving, and for crucifying him.

ON the whole, the moral character imputed to the Supreme Being by christian theology differs little from that imputed to him by the jewish. The difference is rather apparent than real ; and, if the effects of sudden and violent anger are imputed to him in one system, those of slow and silent revenge are imputed to him in the other. The God of the Old testament 'rewards and punishes visibly, and signally, here : he terrifies often by his anger, he reforms sometimes. The God of the New makes little difference here between those whom he approves, and those whom he disapproves ; so little, that he is charged with injustice
for

for it: but he lies in wait to punish the latter hereafter with unrelenting vengeance and eternal torments, when it is too late to terrify, because it is too late to reform. Divines would be therefore under a double obligation to reconcile these passions to the idea of an all-perfect Being, if that was possible. But because it is impossible, they take the part of denying, against the express terms of their scriptures, that he has any such passions. They quote contradictory passages, which were designed *, they say, to make us understand that these representations are imperfect, and to keep us from imagining that the things spoken of are in the same manner in God, in which any of these passages express them: as if inconsistency could preserve from error, or be an excuse for it. They say, very truly, that it would be absurd to understand the representations literally: but they argue very precariously, when they conclude from thence that they were not intended to be so understood. Is it less repugnant to human reason, to ascribe the human passions to the divine nature, than it is to impute to God many other things which our theology imputes to him? I recall them not in particular. This only I will say, and you must own, that it cannot be hard to conceive how the Jews and the first Christians came to entertain such absurd notions, by any man, who considers that, in the most enlightened ages, and at this hour, the greatest part of the christian church believes that the same propitiatory sacrifice, which CHRIST of-

* Archb. KING, ubi sup.

ferred upon the cross, is daily offered up for the living and the dead on ten thousand altars at once, and that they eat and drink the very same body and blood. Well might the Jews and the first Christians believe in contradiction to their reason, when an infinite number of learned men and great philosophers believe in contradiction to their reason and their senses both.

WE have observed above how this nostrum of analogy is applied to purge off the literal meaning of those passages which ascribe to God the form of man. Like a mountebank's panaceaea, it will have no better success when it is applied to purify those that ascribe the human passions to him. Archbishop KING *, for I think it worth my while to quote no other writer in favor of analogy, answers the objection made to this doctrine, "that, " if it be true, all religion may be lost in mere " figures," by saying " that there is great difference between this analogy and what we call " figure. That the use of the last is to represent " things, otherwise well known, so as to magnify " or lessen the ideas we have of them, to move " our passions, and to engage our fancies ; by " which means they are often employed to deceive " us. But that the use of divine analogy is to " give us notions of things where we can have no " direct knowledge." Now, it seems to me that analogy is figure, or it is nothing ; and that, if it is figure, it is of the kind of those which are em-

* Ubi supra.

ployed to deceive us. The use of figure is not only to illustrate, and adorn things known, but to help our conceptions, and to introduce things knowable into the mind. When it is not employed to any of these purposes, to the first by orators and poets, or to the last by philosophers, figurative style is silly, unmeaning talk, or it is imposition, and fraud. We may be deceived by it, no doubt; but we cannot be deceived long, if the use of it be confined to things that are knowable by us. He who is not able to tell us, without any figure, what he means by the figure he employs, will neither deserve, nor have, the attention of men of sense; and, besides, in matters that are knowable by us, we may discover the propriety or impropriety of it by our own researches.

THE case of analogy is very different. It is a similitude or resemblance of an object with some diversity, as the schoolmen say very intelligibly. But then the assertors of it say that this object is not to be known otherwise by us, and that we must be content to know it this way, or not at all. If this assumed divine analogy differs from other figures, therefore, it differs in this, they cannot deceive long, this may deceive always. No, says theology: it never can deceive, because these analogical notions of the divine nature are communicated to us by God himself in his word. But who does not see that this falls into the absurdity mentioned above? A theist doubts of the authenticity of this word, because such notions are con-
tained

tained in it. A divine justifies the notions, because they are contained in it. To want external proof sufficient to constitute this authenticity, and to have internal proof turned against it, would be too much. The weaker the former is, the more necessary it becomes to defend the latter. But then it is defended by so many arbitrary assumptions, and forced interpretations, that a Bible, without a comment, can be reconciled neither to itself, nor to what we know of physical and moral nature; and that, with a comment, it is in a multitude of instances the word of man rather, than the word of God. There are not only things mysteriously, but things untruly, expressed in it. In one case, God has so little regard to the weakness of our capacities, that his language is far above all human conception: in the other, it descends to that of the most illiterate ages, and of the most ignorant people among whom these scriptures were writ, compiled, or published. In the former, we are told that he designs to exercise our faith, which is the angular stone of every instituted religion: in the latter, that he was pleased to speak according to vulgar error, that he might be the better understood; as if the Supreme Intelligence, the God of truth, could stand in need of an expedient to which no philosopher would think himself reduced.

LXXVI.

IT is strange to observe that such a writer, as archbishop KING, should recommend his favorite analogy as the proper and necessary, the usual and general, method of teaching and instructing mankind, and of leading them to knowledge, after he has assumed over and over, that all our knowledge of the divine nature and perfections rests on these notions solely, and can be carried no further. When we are instructed by analogy, by comparison, by figure in one word, on other occasions, it is in order to arrive at the knowledge of matters knowable. Knowledge, that was to rest in these, would not be deemed knowledge, nor even that which we might think we acquired by reasoning from them; for demonstration cannot arise from real, and much less from assumed, similitude nor figure. It must be established on intuitive or sensitive knowledge. The reason is obvious. Similitudes may be assumed, and figures employed falsely. We must go beyond them, and reason independently of them, to know whether they lead us to truth, or not: for the anger of God may be as improper an image, as that of his hands and feet; and there may be, as doubtless there is, in one representation no more proportion, nor resemblance, than in the other. Analogy consists of some similitude and some diversity. As fast as we perceive this similitude and this diversity, it may help us to prove; but of itself,
and

and without this comparifon, which cannot be made when the object is unknown, it can neither prove, nor help us to prove. The right reverend author I have quoted fo often is fond of an example or two, one of which turns againft him, and the other makes nothing for him.

To the man who is a ftranger to any country we produce a map of it. The map is only paper and ink. It is not the country, it has very little likenefs to the country; yet this analogy gives him notions, and as much knowledge of the country as ferves his prefent purpofe. Now, in the firft place, tho it be true that the map gives him the notion of a new country, it is equally true that the map gives him no new notion. He knew what mountains, and valleys, and lakes, and rivers are, before he faw the map; and all he learns by it is, that there are fuch in this unknown country: fo that the comparifon fhews, much againft the intention of the writer, if it fhews any thing, that the human paffions, with which we were acquainted long before the analogical map was fpread before us, are the fame in God that they are in us. The ftrokes and lines of the map do not fhew us Highgate, nor the Thames; the mountains may be higher, the rivers deeper, but they are mountains and rivers ftill, and the nature and the face of the country are much the fame. In the next place, the map was made by perfons who had been on the fpot, or by the communication of exact memorials from them, and they to

whom it is of the utmost consequence to know this knowable country may resort to it, and verify or correct the map, instead of trusting to men who know the country no better, than they do, or who may have an interest to deceive them.

ANOTHER example is taken from our sensitive knowledge of outward objects. The sun, for instance, gives us by his effects the ideas of light and heat; but what they are in themselves, or what the physical nature of the sun is, we know not. Just so, the direction of God's providence in the government of the world gives us the ideas of anger and revenge; but what these are in themselves, or what the moral nature of God is, we know not. This comparison may seem plausible perhaps to some persons. But it will not hold. Whatever light and heat are in themselves, the simple ideas that we distinguish by these names are raised by the action of the sun immediately, and uniformly. But the complex ideas of anger and revenge are not so raised by any act or direction of providence. Disagreeable sensations, or pain, may be immediate effects of such acts or directions; but the moral causes of these are of our own invention. They are not uniformly assigned neither, as they are not immediately nor determinately known; for the same appearances which are ascribed to God's anger or revenge by one man, and at one time, will be ascribed to his justice, or even to his mercy, by another man at the same time, or by the same man at another time.

time. In all these cases, the physical causes are alike unknown in themselves, and in the manner of their operations. They are determined only by their effects. Now, to argue, that because we admit these, which are so determined, we ought to admit moral causes, which are not so determined, is something too sophistical. To conclude this head by bringing an example against analogy much more to the purpose, than those that are brought in favor of it: the man who was born blind imagined, most analogically, a similitude between the sound of a trumpet, and the scarlet color. He substituted the idea he had for that he had not, and reasoned from thence just as well about scarlet, as some men reason from their ideas of anger and revenge about the moral causes that are latent in the divine mind.

It is said that we can have no direct knowledge of the nature of God: which is true in this sense, that all the knowledge we can have of this kind is derived originally from his works, and the proceedings of his providence. All the ways of acquiring a more direct knowledge by architypal ideas which we discern in an intimate union of the human with the divine mind, by the irradiations of mystic theology, or by the inward light of quakerism, and several more, which the phrensy of metaphysics, not very distant from that of enthusiasm, has invented, are too ridiculous to deserve the regard of common sense. But tho we have not, in any of these ways, a direct knowledge

of the nature of God, yet we are not reduced to know nothing of him except by analogy. If the first principles of our knowledge concerning him be reflected, as we have just now said, yet it is real. It is carried into demonstration, and is therefore direct likewise, if we may be allowed to call any knowledge by demonstration direct. What we can see of him within the extent of our horizon, we see clearly. He judged this sufficient for us, he gave us to see no further by that lamp of reason which he has lighted up in our minds; and with this, little as it is, we ought to be content. But the divines, spoken of here, light up their dim taper of analogy, pretend to shew us the shadows of objects they cannot discover, and bid us be content with this. They go further. They assert that this is sufficient for us: and, tho true religion be the most reasonable service, they make it the most unreasonable servitude; for thus they argue*. “Men honor and obey a prince
 “whom they never saw, and whom they could
 “not distinguish from another man, if they met
 “him. Let us suppose God to be such a prince
 “literally, as he is represented analogically. Let
 “us suppose him to love those that obey his or-
 “ders, and to be in rage and fury against the dis-
 “obedient. Can we doubt that he who believes
 “this will be saved by virtue of that belief?” Thus you see that they make at last even their own analogy unnecessary. We may conceive him, by their leave, under all the gross and repugnant

* KING, ubi supra.

images that have been employed to represent him in the jewish scriptures. We may conceive him to be a mighty king, that sits in heaven, and has the earth for his footstool, from whence all things that can happen are in his view. Or we may conceive him, like an eastern monarch, carried about in his palanquin, neither seeing his subjects, nor seen by them, familiar with a few of his favorites, terrible to all the rest of his people, and known only by the pomp with which he is served, and by the severity of his government *. The man, who thinks that every circumstance in the mosaical history of the creation and of the fall is to be understood literally, should think, indeed, that every representation which the scriptures make of God is to be understood in the same manner; since there can be no reason given against interpreting some of these circumstances literally, and some figuratively, that will not hold against interpreting some of these passages one way, and some another. To be consistent, he should disclaim the analogy he contends for: and then nothing more will be wanting to answer all the ends of artificial theology, than to assume, on such premises, that they who minister in holy things are the omrahs, the viziers, and the bassas of this mighty king, whose commands they publish, interpret, and execute, or cause to be executed; rather than his ambassadors: by assuming which latter character they may seem to lessen over modestly the dignity of their

* Vid. KING in his serm. on Gen. ii. 16, 17

own order, and to raise that of the laity too high.—But I am ashamed to have said so much on this subject.

LXXVII.

I MIGHT have concluded sooner, that an analogy arbitrarily assumed is not sufficient to excuse the literal attribution of those human passions to the divine nature, which are the disgrace of ours; that there is little or no difference in reality between one and the other of these attributions, whatever there may be in appearance to an inattentive or prejudiced mind; and that anger and revenge were ascribed by the Jews to the Supreme Being as literally as compassion and mercy, as literally as injustice in this life is ascribed to his providence by atheists and divines, or the justice of it in another is asserted by the latter. The false conceptions, and the licentious reasonings about the divine nature and providence, that have been mentioned, as well as many more, proceed chiefly from the doctrine which teaches that the moral attributes are the same in God as they are in our ideas; that the eternal reason of things by which he acts, is open to all rational beings; and consequently that we are competent judges of his moral proceedings towards us, since we are competent to determine what his moral character requires. But these false conceptions and licentious reasonings may proceed likewise from the analogical doctrine, as contrary as it appears to the other; for by ascribing to God not human notions and passions, but something, whatever it be,

be, equivalent to these, KING might, tho he does not, reason as dogmatically as CLARKE, a priori, from what the creator and governor of the world ought to do in those qualities, to what he has done, which is condemned, and to what they assume he will do, which is justified, and rendered his sole justification. On such conceptions, and such reasonings, the doctrine of future rewards and punishments has been established, as it is still taught. Had it been taught in terms more general and less descriptive, had the punishments been represented, for instance, like the rewards, to be simply such as eye never saw, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man could conceive; it might have been maintained in credit, and have had an universal and real influence perhaps, to the great advantage of religion, even since the days of superstition and ignorance were over. But besides the absurdity of supposing that God inflicts eternal punishments on his creatures, which would render their non-existence infinitely preferable to their existence on the whole, as every one who has not the rage of paradoxes about him must admit; I apprehend that an air of ridicule has been cast on this doctrine by preserving all the idle tales, and burlesque images, which were propagated in those days, and have been preserved in these by the united labors of nurses, pedagogues, painters, poets, and grave divines. I need not enumerate instances. They are enough known: and they have done so much to take off the solemnity, and to weaken the authority, of this doctrine, that the man, who was induced to disbelieve a God by serious

and

and pathetic discourses against his goodness and justice in the government of this world, would be hardly reclaimed to theism by an hypothesis which resembles so nearly that mythologia de inferis he had laughed at so often.

SINCE our divines have thought fit to risque the belief of an all-perfect Being, the creator and governor of all beings, on this hypothesis, they should have made it at least as plausible to the reason of mankind, as their objections are made in some degree to his reason, tho much more to his affections and passions; and on which they have appealed, in concert with the atheists, to this reason, and even to experience. They should not have shewn themselves so much more concerned for this hypothesis, than for the fundamental demonstrated principle of all religion, as to make, if they could, the hypothesis pass, in some sort, for the demonstration, and the demonstration for the hypothesis. They do little less when they attempt to prove that there is no God, if there is no future state; instead of insisting that since there is a God there may be a future state. The Stoics asserted *, that if there was a God, there was divination; and if there was divination, there was a God. “Reciprocantur ista: “si divinatio fit dii sunt; si dii sint, divinatio est.” TULLY might have added in their name, “si divinatio non fit, nec dii sunt.” But the heathen philosopher was on this occasion a better theist, than such a christian divine as CLARKE.

* TULLY De divin.

ANOTHER observation equally true, but not quite so obvious, requires to have it's place here, and to be a little more developed. Natural religion is that original revelation which God has made of himself, and of his will, to all mankind in the constitution of things, and in the order of his providence. Whatever is thus revealed is within the reach of our faculties: and the same reason which he has given us to improve the physical, he has given us to improve the moral, system of our lives. Neither of them is improved equally; of which many apparent causes, and some that would be thought perhaps too refined and too hypothetical, may be assigned. But they who apply their reason the most to these improvements, provide the best for their own well-being both here and hereafter on the supposition of a future state. It would not be hard to shew one less instructed than you are, that human reason is able to discover, in this original revelation, every conceivable duty that we owe to God as our creator, and to man as our fellow-creature. It would be easy to shew that this system of duty is fully proportioned by infinite wisdom to the human state, and to the end of it, human happiness. Natural religion is therefore relatively perfect: and if it was so unrelatively, it would be very imperfect. It is therefore immutable as long as God and man continue to be what they are, as long as we stand in the same relations to him, and to one another. God cannot change, and to suppose that the relations

tions of mankind to him, or to one another, may, or have changed, is to assume arbitrarily, and without any proof, that can be urged in a disputation of this kind. If it does not follow necessarily from hence, sure I am it follows probably, that God has made no other revelation of himself and of his will to mankind. I do not assert that he has made no such particular revelations, as I did not presume to assert that there are never any particular interpositions of his providence: but this I will assert, that if he has made any such, the original and universal revelation must be the foundation and the criterion of them all. Let it be, for argument's sake, that God, who knew from all eternity what the state of mankind and of every society of men would be at every point of time, determined to deal out his revelations by parcels, as legislators are forced to make new laws, and new rules of government that are adapted to circumstances unforeseen by them; instead of making a system of moral law, when he created moral agents, that might answer his whole purpose in all circumstances of time, place, and persons; just as he made a physical system of laws for the other part, the inanimate part of his creation. Let this be assumed for argument's sake, tho it be not in any degree so agreeable to the notions of infinite knowledge and wisdom as the contrary opinion; it must be assumed, at the same time, that there is nothing in any of these posterior revelations inconsistent with the first, even in appearance and to our apprehensions; or it must be

be assumed that God himself, the supreme wisdom, is inconsistent, or gives occasion to his rational creatures to think that he is so.

I REASON very unwillingly, and not without a certain awe on my mind, when I presume to speak of what God may, or may not do, as familiar as this practice is to many. But if it be free from presumption in any case, it is so when we endeavour to expose that of such men as these, and may be said rather to refute their doctrines than to advance dogmatically any of our own. I speak in this manner when I say, agreeably to the most clear and distinct ideas I can frame, that as God, the supreme truth and reason, can neither pronounce nor imply any thing that is false, or absurd, in condescension to our capacities; so he will, in condescension to these capacities, make no revelation to us by his word, which shall be even in appearance, and to human apprehension, inconsistent with what he has revealed of himself and of his will by his works. This revelation, and all that is contained clearly in it, is an object of knowledge. Other revelations, which we assume to be made by his word, and which we receive on the word of man, are objects of belief. Now it would be repugnant to the divine wisdom that he should perplex our knowledge in one case, or weaken our belief in the other, by suggesting inconsistent ideas of his nature, or his will. You will have learned, perhaps, to say that things, which appear in a posterior revelation inconsistent with the first, would

would not appear such, if we could comprehend them clearly and fully. But you will unlearn this lesson, if you consider that the common distinction, of things contrary to reason, and things above it, cannot be employed, on this occasion, to any purpose that will avail. If things contained in any assumed revelation are inconsistent with the religion of nature, they are most certainly contrary to reason, since the religion of nature is collected by reason from the known constitution and relations of things, and from the known order of providence. They are therefore to be rejected. If the things contained in any such revelation be above reason, that is, incomprehensible, I do not say in their manner of being, for that alone would not make them liable to this objection, but in themselves, and according to the terms wherein they are communicated; there is no criterion left by which to judge whether they are agreeable, or repugnant, to the religion of nature and of reason. They are not, therefore, to be received: and he who insists that they should be received independently of this criterion, falls into the absurdity already mentioned. He supposes them reconcileable to the original revelation God has made in his works, because they are contained in his word; whereas it is incumbent on him to shew that these very things are so many internal proofs of the authenticity of this revelation, by shewing that they are all reconcileable to the other. Divines themselves agree to this, or they mean nothing, when they take so much pains to reconcile them to it, in order to conclude, according to
their

their usual method, that a thing is, whenever they imagine they have proved that it may be, or have said enough to make others believe so.

It has been made a question, whether God can, consistently with his goodness, his justice, or even with his wisdom, give such secondary revelations, as are assumed, on particular occasions, or without any occasion and sufficient reason for them; and whether he can, consistently with the same attributes, after leaving his human creatures for a great number of ages under the law of their nature, by which nothing but morality was prescribed, and nothing but immorality forbid, impose new and positive precepts, the precepts of mere will? The question has been agitated with equal presumption on both sides, perhaps; and certainly with much sophism, and more evasion than argument, on one side. I enter not into it. I stand on the ground I have already made; and insist that the law of our nature is perfect, relatively to our system, and must be immutable as long as this system continues. I insist, therefore, that it cannot be altered: but I may admit, for the point is not clear enough to oblige me to it necessarily, that things entirely and exactly consistent with it may be superadded to it by the same divine authority, tho not in a manner equally authentic; and that positive precepts may be given about things which are indifferent by the law of our nature, partaking neither of morality nor immorality, and which become obligatory as soon as they are enjoined by

such positive precepts. Notwithstanding these concessions, it will remain true that every instituted religion is dependent on natural religion, and should be made subservient to it.

THEY all boast that they are so, but experience shews that the very contrary is true. They consist chiefly of articles of faith that go far beyond all the knowledge we can acquire; and of external rites, ceremonies, and positive duties that have no relation to those of the moral kind, which are all included in the precepts of natural religion. Now it is true in fact that to believe these articles of faith, and to practise these external duties, are reputed in all these religions the most essential parts of them: so that a good man and a devout man may be always different, and are often opposite, characters; so opposite, that I suspect no two characters would be found, if they could be nicely examined, in a great number of persons to go together so seldom. This might be exemplified in many instances, but in none more strongly than in that of the Jews. No nation so exact in observing fasts and feasts, and so superstitiously zealous in the practice of every ceremony of a law that abounded with ceremonies. But no nation so unhospitable at the same time, no people so uncharitable, nor so absolutely strangers to that fundamental principle of natural religion, universal benevolence.

PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS.

LXXVIII.

IT were much to be wished that the same reproach could not be made in any degree to the professors of christianity. But I apprehend that they too must pass condemnation on this head. The doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments was established, no doubt, in the christian, as in every other system of instituted religion, to enforce natural, that is, the first, the most authentic, and, as we may say, the mistress of all religions, since they should be all subservient to her. But this doctrine is applied, in every communion of Christians, as much to enforce matters of metaphysical speculation, or positive duties, or forms of worship which are neither parts of natural religion, nor have any necessary connection with our moral obligations, as it is applied to enforce these. The mistress is set on a level with the servant, and the same regard is paid to one as to the other. But why do I say the same, when it is manifest that much more regard is paid in many instances, and in the application we speak of here particularly, to the latter than to the former? Metaphysical speculations, positive duties, and forms of worship, can have no merit any further than they contribute to maintain and improve in our minds an awful sense of the majesty of the Supreme Being, of our dependence on him, of our duties to him, and of the moral obligations under which we lye to our fellow-creatures: and as far as they contribute to these purposes, whe-

ther they are of human or of divine institution, they have great merit, and are of great importance. Their merit and their importance, however, cannot be equal to those of the religion they are designed to maintain and improve : and yet we find them treated by the doctors and professors of christianity as if they had more of both, as if this part of instituted religion could be substituted in the place of that part of it which republishes natural religion, and could supply the want of it.

THE clergy, who have taken the distribution of future rewards and punishments into their own hands, distribute them according to this rule. The man who has been a bad son, a bad husband, a bad father, a bad citizen, who has passed his whole life in the practice of private and public immorality, languishes on a sick bed. Conscious of guilt, he apprehends punishment, and all the terrors of hell stare him in the face. He repents, therefore, may signify in this case nothing more than this, he is afraid ; and so will the most hardened villain be at the foot of the gallows. It is too late to amend, too late to repair the injuries he has done. The priest, however, who gave the terror, is called to administer the comfort. The man confesses his sins, makes an orthodox profession of his faith, joins in the prayers that are said over him, takes leave of the world with all the decorum which the discipline of his church requires, and dies. We are bound to believe well of this man's salvation, and we commit his body

to the ground, “in a sure and certain hope of his resurrection to eternal life.” The man who has passed his whole life in the practice of every moral virtue, and has lived up to the duties of natural religion in every relation, and in every station, has fulfilled by consequence all the obligations of revealed religion, as far as the latter is designed to republish and enforce the former. But the latter is designed more immediately, and preferably, for another purpose: and therefore the hope of heaven is held out to one man, notwithstanding his wicked life; the fear of hell is held out to another, notwithstanding his good life, on several occasions. Faith unimposed, and forms and ceremonies unprescribed, by natural religion, may atone for the violations of it; but the strict observance of it cannot atone, in any communion, for the want of faith even in matters that have been much disputed among Christians, and that are so still in other communions; nor for the neglect of forms and ceremonies that are of mere human institution, and that have varied frequently, as all such institutions must and do vary by their own nature, and by the nature of those who make, and of those for whom they are made. To bring an instance or two, that occur to me first out of many. Read the creed of ATHANASIUS, and then consider that the man we suppose in this place, who has conformed his whole life to the precepts of natural religion, and of reason, cannot be saved *, but must perish without doubt everlastingly, unless he

* xxxix Articles.

believes faithfully such a rhapsody of jargon as talapoins and bonzes would be hardly brought to avow, as wants a sufficient foundation in the gospel, as none but factious priests, who meant to divide, not to unite, could have combined to propagate, and as none, but the least reasonable and the most implicit set of men, could have received for truth. Consider again, that the trite ceremony of baptism, instituted by the Heathens, practised by the Jews, and adopted by the Christians, is made so essential a part of religion under the vague name of a sacrament, that neither the moral goodness of men, nor the innocence of children, can secure their salvation, unless they have passed through this mystical washing: without which, and the graces consequent to it, the good works of the former are not pleasant to God, but have the nature of sin; and the innocence of the other is infected by that original taint which spread from the transgression of ADAM, and corrupted human nature in all his posterity.

THESE are principles of artificial theology, and such is the ecclesiastical distribution of future rewards and punishments in all christian communions. I wave descending into particular examples taken from the east or the west, from your church or from mine. This difference only I would observe between the two last. You acknowledge still a spiritual monarch, the vicar of JESUS CHRIST on earth, and an infallible judge in all matters of religion, to whom you ascribe a supreme

preme ecclesiastical authority. At least the royalists prevail amongst you, and the partisans of spiritual liberty are few. We have thrown off this ridiculous but heavy yoke: and thus it is more easy, and therefore more frequent to impose new doctrines, new rites, new ceremonies in your church, than in mine; to save, to beatify, to sanctify, whom his holiness pleases, and to pronounce as many arbitrary sentences of damnation as he thinks fit. Thus we have seen the constitution Unigenitus, that child of jesuitical revenge, procured by fraud, and maintained by tyranny, erected into a rule of faith in France, where a few years before, to shew the exercise of this power in a light as ridiculous as scandalous, not only propositions extracted from the works of JANSENIUS were condemned, but even they who did not understand the language in which the bishop of Ipres writ, like the nuns of Port-royal, were required to believe, and affirm that these very propositions were contained in his writings.

SUCH occasional abuses of the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, which the pope and his inferior pontiffs have applied with little regard to natural religion, and even with more regard to their artificial theology than to revealed religion, have been frequent. But there is another, which has been constant in all the ages of the church, and by which the clergy has raised exorbitant contributions on the laity. When christianity appeared first in the world, the professors of it com-

posed a little, and in general a poor, flock. They who had some substance helped to maintain those who had none; alms were gathered for the saints, and every church had a common purse. Like our quakers, they provided for their own poor; and, like our quakers too, the teachers and the taught made one body, one undivided society. The former as well as the latter lived on what they had of their own, or on the common purse, or on the bread they acquired by their industry: and, as ludicrous as it may seem, it may be said seriously, because it may be said truly, that if this order of things had been preserved among Christians, we might behold at this day, with great edification, some of my lords the bishops working at their leisure hours (and they have many such from episcopal functions at least) in their trades, like St. PAUL. But this order of things was changed early, and the distinction of clergy and laity established; after which the former enjoyed, in their own right, or as trustees for the poor, all that had belonged to every church in common before. When the former came by several means to be considered as a separate society under the name of the church, they appropriated the wealth, which increased daily, as well as the name, to themselves: and when every church had a bishop, the superior robbed the inferior pastors, and appropriated to himself what belonged to them, to his church, and to the poor; all of whom he threw on the laity, to be maintained by them.

LXXIX.

THAT I may not render the deduction too long for this place, I content myself to observe further, that, as this order of men increased in outward dignity and riches, to neither of which they had any other claim than that which their own usurpations, and the bigot generosity of superstitious ages, gave them, they increased in ambition and avarice. The doctrine of a future state was prostituted to serve the purposes of both; and as soon as they had persuaded the laity that the power of tying and untying, which was given by CHRIST to his disciples, invested the clergy with a power of determining in this world the condition of men in another, heaven and hell became inexhaustible sources of ecclesiastical dominion and wealth, and were applied to little else. The man, for instance, who left his estate to the church, and to pious uses, as they are called, completed all the immoralities of his life by defrauding his family at his death. But the priest, or monk, conveyed him to heaven directly: and passports for that purpose, even of modern date, are said to have been found in the hands of the dead. The layman, who had a dispute with the church, stood exposed to the thunderbolt of excommunication, which he was prepared to believe did not only separate him from her communion here, but would deprive him of happiness hereafter; so that he might be damned eternally for withholding a tithe pig.

It

It was left to the industry of the clergy to improve these advantages in their several stations all over the christian world; and it must be owned that they improved them to the utmost of their delegated power: for, being delegated, as extensive as it was, it was circumscribed. But that from which it was delegated, and which resided in the seat of this empire, the papal power, in short, knew no bounds. Casuists have taught that the pope may by the fullness of it determine rightfully against right*: as if he made things good and just by willing them; which is, I think, the prerogative of God, but which no man, except a casuist, will affirm to be that of his pretended vicar. The proposition will sound harshly to your ears, how catholic soever they may be; but if you consider the practice of your church, and the pretensions of your sovereign pontiff, you will be forced to confess that they can be founded on nothing less than the supposition of such an exorbitant power as I have mentioned. There is no duty of natural, nor of revealed religion, nor of ecclesiastical institution, commonly much more respected than either, from the observation of which you may not be free by dispensations, in the breach of which you may not be indulged, or for the breach of which you may not be still more easily pardoned, at a market price: and this market price was formerly settled and published in a book of rates, that every good

* Ex plenitudine potestatis jure potest etiam contra jus discernere.

christian might know how much his favorite vice would cost him. A passage in the gospel should have been altered on this occasion, and men should have been taught that it is more easy for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a poor man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

A CASUIST more modest, and who thinks himself more subtil, than the former, may alledge perhaps, for it has been alledged, that the pope has virtually the keys of heaven since he has those of the treasure of the church, that treasure of merits which cannot be exhausted, the merits of JESUS CHRIST that are infinite, and that render therefore the rest of the heap unnecessary being contained in it ; that the pope does not pretend to remit the debt which the sinner owes to God, on a balance of the account of good and evil actions, but that he pays it by assigning out of this treasure as much merit as every sinner, who applies to him, wants to entitle him to salvation. So father PAUL represents the doctrine "ricompensa il debito del peccatore con assegnare altrettanto valor del tesoro *." Thus, it may be said, the pope decrees in all these cases according to a right which God has established, and not against right by virtue of an assumed arbitrary unlimited power. But this whimsical hypothesis, if it could be received, would answer the purpose for which it is invented, by halves at most, for there is something behind much worse than the accusation already brought.

* Con. di Tren. L. i.

LXXX.

YOUR divines, as well as ours, affirm very truly of the preceptive parts, that tho natural and revealed religion are distinct, yet the difference between them is not a difference of opposition; and that the latter, which enjoins positive duties not enjoined by the former, enjoins none that are inconsistent with it. But now the same men, who say this very truly when they speak of the precepts of the gospel, say it very falsely when they speak of the religion which their artificial theology has imposed for christianity, and which is no more like to it in some respects than talapoism, bonzism, or lamaism are. Some of them hold morality in small account. They place all religion in the observation of such rites and ceremonies as their church has instituted, and in various acts of external devotion. They have been spoken of already. Their whole religion is a system of superstition, unworthy of God as the author, and unworthy to be believed and practised by rational creatures. There are those again who hold morality in no account at all. Tho God has given us reason to discern our moral obligations, and a freedom of will to practise them, on which foundation alone it can be said either probably, or plausibly, that we are accountable creatures, and have been such in every age of the world; yet would there have been no such thing as moral virtue, nor as good works, if CHRIST had never
 XXXI
 come

come into the world, according to these doctors : for if moral righteousness was at all times alike conformable to the will of God, in which conformity the very nature of it consists, it must have been at all times alike acceptable to him ; at least it could never be unacceptable : but we are told that it is unacceptable, unless it follow justification, unless it be produced by faith, by grace, by inspiration, and a whole process of mystery. Before CHRIST, therefore, it could not be conformable to the will of God, it could have no merit, nay, it could have no nature, there could be no such thing. This surely is fanaticism, and leads to enthusiasm. There are those again, and of those particularly I mean to speak in this place, who admit that there is a religion of nature and of reason, that is, a primitive revelation, which ought to be the foundation and criterion of every other : but in fact they deny what in words they admit ; for under pretence of explaining and teaching a posterior revelation, they contradict the first. Their artificial theology does not only take in much of the superstition and fanaticism that have been mentioned, but imposes for doctrines and precepts of christianity, and enforces by the sanctions of eternal rewards and punishments, such as would prove this revelation to be inconsistent and false, if they were really contained in it.

Nothing can be more repugnant to the spirit of christianity than violence, persecution, and tyranny. Meekness, and humility, forgiveness of injuries,

injuries, and benevolence exalted into charity, are the great characteristics of this religion. They are so essential to it, that many have deemed it on this account a fit profession for some private sect, but a rule impracticable in the great political societies of mankind, and in the government of them*. That the clergy deemed it to be so very early, and has acted on this principle ever since, is evident to those who know any thing of the ecclesiastical history. The first missionaries of the gospel were sent forth to preach, to persuade, to convert, and baptise. If they did not succeed, they had no power to call down fire from heaven; they were to shake off the dust of their feet, and to depart quietly. Their commission extended no further. If they did succeed, they established a church in the place under certain orders, and regulations of discipline; which seemed to be a necessary consequence of their original, and solely authentic, commission, tho not expressly contained in it. Among these regulations, that of separating from the congregations and communion of christians, and of delivering over to Satan, unless they re-

* When christians became numerous the names of eminent bishops alone were recited out of the diptychs; but when they were few, all that died in the communion of the church were commemorated in this manner. The diptychs were registers originally of the subjects of CHRIST, who were to be hereafter citizens of the new Jerusalem typified by the church on earth. Excommunication out of one, therefore, excluded out of the other. Hence the expression, that names were written in heaven and in the book of life, or that mens names were cast out.

pented

pented and satisfied the church, such as were guilty of notorious crimes, and such as presumed to teach in those congregations a contrary doctrine, was made by common consent. I say it was made, because it is plain it was executed, by common consent.

BUT this power became soon confined, in the exercise, to a few persons; and extended little by little, in the application of it, to a multitude of cases neither intended, nor thought of in the first institution. Persons were appointed by the collective body of christians in every church, that is, by every church, to perform the duties which the apostles, that founded these churches, and the first pastors of them however appointed, whether by the apostles, or by the churches, performed. The persons thus appointed did not cease to be members of the same religious society, for the whole congregation of christians was properly such, any more than persons appointed to military or civil employments cease to be members of the same political society. But the solemn air with which these spiritual magistrates were admitted into their offices by ordination and consecration, if these ceremonies are to be distinguished in honor of episcopacy, gave them a pretence to assume, and prepared others to believe, that there was, besides the human appointment, something divine in their institution; that they received the Holy Ghost by imposition of hands, and could transmit the same gift to others by the same ceremony. Thus they came to be esteemed not
only

only a distinct order, as the priests, the soldiers, and the husbandmen were in the kingdom of Egypt, but a distinct and independent society too in many respects. This I mean. After CONSTANTINE had established christianity in the empire, the clergy were regarded as a superior order in the state, whenever it was most advantageous for them to be reputed such; and as a distinct society in it, whenever they thought fit, under the name of the church, to exercise powers, and to claim and procure to their order the enjoyment of immunities or privileges which they could neither claim, nor have any pretence to enjoy, under the first character, and as members of the same state. From hence arose a double absurdity. It was absurd, for it implied contradiction, that the same order of men should be, and should not be at once a member of the same commonwealth. It was absurd, for it was repugnant to all the ideas of order, to suffer what is commonly called imperium in imperio, to suffer a second supreme legislative power to grow up where a first was already established; and such a power especially as claimed a superior original, and an independent exercise: from which claims it was easy to foresee what happened soon, that the two powers would clash, that a conflict of jurisdictions would arise, and that the ecclesiastical might prevail over the civil.

THE principal and most effectual weapon, which the clergy employed to make men submit to this tyranny, was the chimerical weapon of excommunication,

nication, forged in the chimerical fire of hell. They employed it first in their spiritual wars, for the state of christianity has been a state of war from the beginning. In these they excommunicated and damned one another, till, ignorance, superstition, and bigotry realising chimeras, these spiritual wars became very carnal. The clergy railed, and the laity cut throats. Ecclesiastical quarrels disturbed the peace of the latter empire as much, and caused the effusion of as much blood, as the invasions of barbarous nations. But things grew worse as the church grew stronger : and the scene became more disorderly, and more bloody too, after CHARLES the great, when the western church was reduced into a monarchy, and the bishop of Rome became the monarch. In this elevation, with the whole body of the clergy more united, and better disciplined under him, his own ambition increased, and he animated and guided theirs. They had made themselves before this time a distinct society from the civil in every country where they had been admitted. His authority over them had been very great, if it had not been entire, in every country. He abetted them in their usurpations, and they in return abetted his. But in this age the clergy secular and regular composed not only a distinct ecclesiastical society in every particular state, they coalited into one political body, whereof the pope was the head all over the west. The contention for superiority over the civil powers was avowed ; and whilst these defended themselves separately, or, which was worse, whilst they as-

sisted the common enemy against one another, they were all subdued alike. Some of the greatest emperors were excommunicated, and in consequence insulted, oppressed, dethroned. The ecclesiastical order, and, at the instigation of this, all the other orders in their dominions, revolted against them. They discovered, as well as other princes and states, but they all discovered it too late, how dangerous it is to protect, enrich, fortify, or even to suffer, any order of men, who, having a distinct interest, and owing a distinct allegiance, must of course become a distinct society in the state; and especially when this order has the means of turning the consciences, and inflaming the passions, of men by religion against the state, and the legal government of it. GREGORY the seventh carried these usurpations and this tyranny to the utmost height, by a more impudent, as well as a more successful, prostitution of the doctrine of a future state, than any of his predecessors. From him his successors learned to distribute plenary indulgencies with profusion, and to extend particular excommunications into general interdicts. By the first, they sold heaven to the best bidders, and sent men in shoals to eternal happiness. By the second, they condemned whole nations at once, deprived them of the means of salvation, and subjected them in one collective body to eternal misery. The first was a never failing source of wealth, the second of power. No instance can be produced in all these proceedings of any regard to true religion. Virtue and
vice

vice were out of the case. Even the opera operata of external devotion were enjoined for the sake of form alone. To be truly orthodox, and in a state of salvation, it was sufficient to submit blindly to the authority of the church, and to procure the advancement of it against law, reason, and every moral obligation. To be heretical, and in a state of damnation, it was sufficient to refuse the submission, or to resist the usurpation. This abuse of the doctrine of a future state grew so common in a short time, that it was employed not only in the great struggles, which arose between the ecclesiastical and civil powers, but in every paultry affair, wherein the popes had any personal, or family concern; and indulgencies and excommunications were let loose by this mitred tyrant to satiate the ambition or avarice of a brother, a sister, a nephew, a niece, a whore, or a bastard.

LXXXI.

IT is true that this exorbitancy has been restrained within two centuries: and this restraint is due to the reformation. We shook off the tyrant and his tyranny at once. You have filed the fangs, and blunted the teeth of the beast. He may mumble and bruise; he cannot tear, and bite, and devour as he did. But still the instances that have been cited are proper, and the reflections that have been made just. The instances are proper, because they are instances of the use that was made of this doctrine in the whole christian church during se-

veral centuries. The reflections are just, because tho the same use is not made of it now, even in your communion, that was made formerly, yet the same moral arguments are employed to maintain it; arguments which cannot be reconciled, as it seems to my apprehension, to the belief of an all-perfect Being.

To demonstrate the existence of such a being by appeals to the inward consciousness of their own existence, to the senses, and to the reason of men, is not a difficult task. But he who has succeeded in it, runs the risque of undoing what he has done, when he appeals at once to the senses and to the passions of men, for the injustice of God's dispensations here; and to their reason alone prejudiced by the former, for the justice of his dispensations hereafter; tho the actuality of these must be always hypothetical, and the equity of them not so much as problematical. The divines of our communion run this risque even more than yours, because when they presume to reason they have not the same reserve of church authority, which yours have, to stop the mouths of gainfayers. They put the truth, or rather the belief, of God's existence, in all they preach, and all they write, on the cast of a dye: they may confirm their hearers and their readers in the doctrine they teach, but they may shake too the fundamental principle of all religion. Nay, they may drive into absolute atheism the man who is weak enough to be moved by one part of what they say, and not weak enough to be con-
vinced

vinced by the other. No matter. They not only repeat the moral arguments, and the bold assertions that have been mentioned already, but they tell us sometimes, that the rules of evangelical perfection, such as self-denial, mortification, and others, are of so exalted a kind, that God gave the hope of future rewards to encourage us to the practice of them*. According to this doctrine then he is so cruel a being, that he will make none happy hereafter, who have not made themselves miserable here. The man who will be saved must be initiated into the fanatical austerities of some religious order to make his salvation sure, for aught I can see; and when he is so, he may have good reason perhaps to renew the question *DIOGENES* asked, “num PATROECIONI furi, quod initiatus fuerit, fors erit melior post mortem, quam EPAMINONDAE?” They tell us sometimes, that the temporal promises made to an holy and virtuous life extend no further than to food, and raiment, and to daily bread; and they demand, who would be contented with such a scanty provision, when he sees the greater prosperity of bad men who dissolve in ease and luxury†? The proper answer to this question is to be made ad hominem, by asking another. Who would not be contented with this scanty provision here on the same terms, and why are not you, why do you, good man, repine at the greater prosperity of the wicked, when you know that eternal happiness is laid up in store for you, and eter-

* ATTERBURY.

† SHERLOCK, not the righteous bishop, but his father.

nal misery for them, who will want even a drop of water to cool their tongues in the next world, after dissolving in luxury here? They tell us sometimes, that without the hopes of another life virtue is but a dead and empty name*. Nay, there are those who have not scrupled to assert that, if there is not another world, all difference between good and bad is taken away in this world†. To steal, to poison, to stab, to forswear, in short to commit any action that brings either profit, or pleasure, is reasonable: it is so far from being a crime, that it becomes a duty, in as much as it promotes the happiness, that is, the chief end of the man who commits it. The two first of these doctrines are the very quintessence of theological absurdity, the two last are abhorrent from all the principles of natural religion, and none of them come up to the purpose for which they are advanced. If there is no other life, virtue is but a dead and empty name, they say; and yet the infinite wisdom of the Creator has constituted the state of mankind, and the order of things in this world so, that human happiness rises and falls, is acquired or lost, in proportion to the practice or neglect of virtue. Crimes are reasonable, vice becomes a duty on the same supposition that there is no future state, they say; and yet vice is as opposite to virtue in it's effects, as in it's nature, according to the same constitution, and the same order of things. Neither the immortality of the soul, nor future rewards and punishments can be demonstrated on principles of reason,

* TILLOTSON.

† WILKINS, cum aliis.

notwithstanding all the metaphysical, theological, and even geometrical, attempts that have been made, with the same evidence as all our moral obligations may be. The religion of nature therefore, teaches the latter independently of the former. There may be rewards and punishments reserved to another life; but whether there are, or are not, the religion of nature teaches that morality is our greatest interest, because it tends to the greatest happiness of our whole kind in this life; and our greatest duty, because it is made such by the will of that Supreme Being who created us and the system to which we belong. It is false, therefore, and impious to assert, as these divines do, that, if there is no other life, there are no moral obligations; or, as PASCHAL does, that if there were no other life, the directions of reason for our conduct in this world would not be such as they are.

BUT to have done with such absurdities for good and all. I cannot close these minutes better, than by observing how wide a difference there is between natural and artificial religion. It has been observed*, that the difference between the things of nature and those of art appears to our great surprise since microscopes have been in use; and this surprise increases in proportion as they are improved. The things of nature appear to be adapted to useful purposes, wherever these purposes can be discerned; they are elegant, they are finished, and the mind is ravished into admiration. The things

* By bishop WILKINS in his treatise on nat. relig.

of art are adapted often to purposes that are hurtful: and to whatever purposes they are adapted, when we see them such as they really are, they appear to be clumsy, bungling, coarse, and imperfect instruments. A just and easy application of this remark might be made to things intellectual, and especially to those of a theological kind, and to the reasonings of men about them. Thus, to take an instance of the highest and most important object of human speculation, let us reflect once more on the notions that philosophers and divines have entertained and propagated concerning the Deity: for these are the fountains of all religions; and as they are pure, or impure, so must the streams that flow from them be. Right reason neither stops too short, nor goes too far, in attempts to frame such notions as these. She frames them in that light which comes reflected from the works of God, and in which alone we may say that he shews himself to man. Imagination, on the contrary, knows no bounds, but proceeds from one hypothetical reasoning to another, till she has framed all those notions of the Deity, which the prepossessions, the habits, the professions, and the interests of the men, who give her this loose, require. The consequence has been, and it could be no other, that natural religion represents an all-perfect Being to our adoration and to our love; and the precept, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," will be effectual in this system. In the other, in that of artificial theology, I apprehend that it cannot be so; for I have
learned

learned from doctor BARROW *, that in the frame of the human soul “ the perceptive part doth always go before the appetitive: that affection follows opinion; and that no object otherwise moves our desire than as represented by reason, or by fancy, good unto us. This,” he says, “ is our natural way of acting; and, according to it, that we may in due measure love God, he must appear proportionably amiable and desirable to us. He must appear to be the fountain of all good, the sole author of all the happiness we can hope for.” Can any man now presume to say that the God of MOSES, or the God of PAUL, is this amiable Being? The God of the first is partial, unjust, and cruel; delights in blood, commands assassinations, massacres, and even exterminations of people. The God of the second elects some of his creatures to salvation, and predestinates others to damnation, even in the womb of their mothers. This precept of the gospel, therefore, cannot refer to such a God as either of these: and indeed, if there was not a Being infinitely more perfect than these, there would be no God at all, nor any true religion in the world. But there is most assuredly such a being; and he who proposes any system of religion, wherein this all-perfect Being is not to be found, may say that he is no atheist, but cannot say with truth that he is a theist.

* Serm. XXIII.

The SUBSTANCE of some

L E T T E R S,

Written originally in FRENCH,

about the Year MDCCXX,

T O

MR. DE P O U I L L Y.

The SUBSTANCE of some

LETTERS,

Written originally in FRENCH,

About the Year MDCCXX,

T O

MR. DE POUILLY.

SINCE you are so curious to know what passed in a conversation lately between one of your acquaintance and myself, wherein you have been told that I maintained a very singular paradox; I will give you some account of it, a general and short account, at least, of the first part, and one more particular and more full of the last, which is called paradoxical. You led me first, in my retreat, to abstract philosophical reasonings: and, tho it be late to begin them at forty years of age, when the mind has not been accustomed to them earlier, yet I have learned enough under so good a guide, not to be afraid of engaging in them whenever the cause of God and of natural religion is concerned.

THEY

THEY were both concerned, very deeply, on the occasion you refer to. There had been much discourse, in the company that was present, concerning the absurd opinions, which many theistical philosophers entertained of old about the Supreme Being. Many had been cited, and many reflections had been made on them, by several, when the dispute became particular between * DAMON and me, he denying, and I affirming, that there are sufficient proofs of the existence of one Supreme Being, the first intelligent cause of all things. You may be sure I made use of those you furnished me with by a geometrical application of the doctrine of final causes, which shews, in various instances, what numberless chances there are against one, that intelligence and design were employed in the production of each of these phaenomena.

WHEN I could not silence my adversary by these proofs, tho they carry probability up to a reasonable, if not to an absolute, certainty, I insisted on a proof, which must give this certainty, I think, to every one, who acknowledges that we are capable of demonstrative knowledge. I argued a posteriori, from the intuitive knowledge of ourselves, and the sensitive knowledge of objects exterior to ourselves, which we have, up to that demonstrative knowledge of God's existence, which we are able to acquire by a due use of our

* I chuse to call him by this feigned name here.

reason.

reason. Here we stuck a little, and he was ready to deny all sensitive knowledge, on the chimerical notions of father MALBRANCHE, and some other philosophers, without considering that he deprived himself, in denying the existence of God, of those expedients, by which the others pretended to account for the perception of the ideas of objects exterior to the mind, independently of any sensitive knowledge. I endeavoured to shew him that, to renounce sensitive knowledge, was to renounce, in some sort, humanity, and to place ourselves in some unknown rank, either above it, or below it. I endeavoured to state the true notion, by stating the true bounds, of sensitive knowledge, which is not sufficient indeed to shew us the inward constitutions of substances, and their real essences; but which is sufficient to prove to us their existence, and to distinguish them by their effects. I concluded this article by quoting to him a passage in the Logic of Port-royal, wherein it is said that no man ever doubted, in good earnest, whether there is an earth, a sun, and a moon, no more than he doubted whether the whole is bigger than a part; that we may say with our mouths that we doubt of all these things, because we may lie; but that we cannot oblige our minds to say so: from whence it is concluded, more generally than I shall conclude, that Pyrrhonians are not a sect persuaded of what they say, but a sect of liars. He did not insist much longer, but left me to pursue my argument from intuitive and sensitive knowledge, to a demonstration of God's existence; which

which great and fundamental truth results necessarily from a concurrence of all the kinds of human knowledge employed in the proof of it.

I WAS not interrupted by him in the course of this argument, nor did he attempt to break any links of this chain of demonstration, but followed the example of all those who refuse to yield to it. They are so far from considering the degrees, the bounds, and, within these, the sufficiency, of human knowledge, that they ask continually, and that others endeavour very often vainly to give them, knowledge concerning the divine nature and attributes particularly, which it is impossible and unnecessary we should have, even on the supposition that there is a God. Unable to break through this demonstration, they hope to weaken the effect of it on themselves and others, by founding high the difficulties that present themselves whenever we reason on the manner of God's existence, on his attributes, on his providence, and on many points relative to these: that is, they will not receive a demonstration, made according to the clearest and most distinct ideas that we have, and by the most precise connection of them, because there are other things, which we cannot demonstrate, nor explain, for want of other ideas. This proceeding is so unreasonable, that the atheist himself does not hold it on any other occasion; but admits the truth of many propositions, tho he be unable to resolve several difficulties that are, some way or other, relative to them. He reasons
on

on this important article of human knowledge as he would be ashamed to reason on any other.

I MIGHT have rested the argument here, because tho there are secrets of the divine nature and economy which human reason cannot penetrate, yet several of the objections to them, which atheists commonly make, even that of physical and moral evil, and the supposed unjust distribution of good and evil, which has been made in all ages, and which is now more prevalent than ever, by the joint endeavours of atheists and christian divines, are easy to be refuted. These subjects have been so often treated between you and me, that I shall say nothing of them here, tho I did not decline them there: on the contrary, if I do not flatter myself, I said enough to defeat the attack of the atheist, and to disappoint the treachery of the divine. After which I insisted, with great reason surely on my side, that these difficulties, and more of the same sort, were so little able to embarrass the theist, that, instead of being repugnant to his system, a necessary consequence of it is, that such difficulties should arise. He is so little surpris'd to find them, that he would be surpris'd not to find them. In demonstrating, to him, the existence of God, his reason has not demonstrated to him a being little rais'd above humanity, and about whom he may always assume on human ideas, such as the divinities of the heathen were. She has demonstrated to him the existence of an all-perfect self-existent Being, the source of all

existence, invisible and incomprehensible ; the author, not only of all that is visible and comprehensible to his creatures, but of all that is in the whole extent of nature, whether visible or comprehensible to them or not. From hence he concludes, and well he may, that there must be many phaenomena physical and moral for which he can, and many for which he cannot, account. The system of God's attributes being, like the exercise of them, infinite, and our system of ideas and of mental operations being very narrow and imperfect, it follows necessarily that some few parts of the former system are proportionable to the latter, and that a multitude of others are not so. A theist may suffer himself to be led into difficulties ; but the atheist, take what system of atheism you please, must fall into absurdity, and be obliged to assert what implies contradiction.

I CONSIDERED the Supreme Being, in all I said, as a first intelligent cause, and as the creator of the universe. From hence my antagonist took occasion to ridicule what theistical poets, philosophers, and legislators have advanced concerning the first principles or the beginning of things, and the operations of a divine wisdom and power in the production of them, as if they had been cotemporary historians and spectators of what they related most affirmatively and circumstantially. I joined with him, for the most part, in giving them this ridicule ; and expressed myself with a just indignation against them for attempting

ing to impose so many fictions on mankind, and for presuming to account for the proceedings of infinite wisdom and power by the whimsies of their own imaginations. He did not spare MOSES, nor I PLATO. But when he went so far as to deny, on the strength of a very weak sophism, that we are obliged to ascribe the creation or formation of the world to intelligence and wisdom, he turned, I think, the ridicule on himself, for he reasoned thus :

WHEN you investigate the proceedings of nature, you observe certain means, that seem, to you, proportioned to certain ends. You perceive too that you cannot imitate nature any other way than by proportioning means to ends : and thus you frame that complex idea of wisdom, to which you ascribe the phaenomena, and the imaginary final causes of them. But you are grossly mistaken when you assume that nature acts by such means as seem to you proportioned to these ends. Here is a clock which marks the hours and minutes, and strikes regularly, at certain periods, a certain number of times. The inward construction of this clock is unknown to you. But you see one made, which, by the means of certain weights, produces all the same effects. Will you assert now that the motions of the first clock are regulated by weights, because those of the second are so ? You will be much deceived if you do, for the motions of the first clock are produced and regulated by a spring.

THIS argument would have some force in opposition to such naturalists as STRATO of Lampascus, as DES CARTES, and as others who have made hypothetical worlds, and have pretended to account for all the phaenomena by such laws of matter and motion as they have thought fit to establish. But in the present case it is a mere paralogism, and unworthy of the man who employed it, since it serves to explain and confirm that very reasoning which it is intended to oppose. The same motions are produced indeed by different means ; but still these different means are proportioned alike to the same end : which proves the very thing I would prove, the intelligence of a workman.

WHEN we had done speaking of philosophers who admit the beginning of the world, we proceeded to those who deny it ; and DAMON seemed to think himself strongly intrenched in the system of it's eternity. As we cannot conceive, said he, that matter was created and brought out of nothing, so we cannot conceive neither that matter could of itself produce motion, nor that matter and motion together could produce thought. But there arises from hence no necessity of assuming that there is any superior being. Matter, motion, thought, are eternal ; and have been always what they are. The same nature, and the same course of things, that exist actually, have always existed.

To

To this it was easy to answer, that if I agreed with him in owning the eternity of the world, this concession would not infirm the proofs I had brought of an eternal Being, distinct from the world, as the workman is from his work. We may allow the world to be eternal, without allowing that it is the sole eternal Being. All that exists, has a cause of it's existence, either out of itself, or in itself. It has no cause of it's existence out of itself, if it is the sole eternal Being. It has this cause then within itself, and exists by the necessity of it's own nature. The atheist affirms then that it is impossible to conceive that this world should not exist ; or should exist any otherwise than it does exist, both in matter and in form. This seems to me infinitely absurd ; for the atheist either has no ideas in his mind when he pronounces these words, “ exists by the necessity of it's “ nature ;” or he understands such a necessity of existence, that a supposition of the contrary would imply contradiction. If the atheist says, he has no idea of such a necessity, he has then no idea of the eternity of the world. If he says, as DAMON did say, that he can no more conceive this world not to exist, or to exist differently from it's present existence, than he can conceive the equality of twice two to four not to exist, he says nothing to the purpose ; since the necessity of existence, according to him, cannot be admitted till he has given us another definition of what we are to understand by these words : and another definition,

intelligible and reasonable, I think, he never will be able to give.

AFTER having pushed this argument beyond reply, which I borrowed but did not weaken, I added, that ARISTOTLE, and other antient philosophers, who believed the world eternal, did not fall into the absurdity of believing it uncaused. They believed it eternal in the order of time; but they believed it the effect of a superior cause in the order of causality. The distinction is, perhaps, too metaphysical: but it serves to shew, since they made it, to what shifts they were driven in maintaining the eternity of the world, and how little reason the modern atheist has to lean on their authority.

FROM refuting his opinions I was led to advance one of my own, and to assert that this fact, “The world had a beginning,” is a fact founded on such a tradition, as no reasonable man can refuse to accept. This is the paradox: in advancing of which I had, not only DAMON, but almost all those who were present, against me. I took up the rest of our conversation: and I will tell you, not only what I said, to support my opinion then, but what has come into my thoughts upon the same subject since.

THO we cannot have, strictly speaking, a certain knowledge of any fact whereof we have not been ourselves witnesses, yet are there several such facts whereof we cannot doubt. High probability

lity must stand often in lieu of certainty ; or we must be, every moment, at a loss how to form our opinions and to regulate our conduct. Such is our condition ; and we cannot think it unreasonably imposed, since we are able, by a right use of our reason, to ascend through various degrees from absolute improbability, which is little distant from evident falsehood, to that degree of probability which is little distant from evident truth. On this principle let us proceed to consider, how high this proposition, “ The world had a “ beginning,” stands in the scale of probability. We shall find, perhaps, that it stands too high to have the proposition pass for a paradox, when I have told you what was said in conversation, and what has occurred to me since, on the same subject.

AN historical fact, which contains nothing that contradicts general experience, and our own observation, has already the appearance of probability ; and, if it be supported by the testimony of proper witnesses, it acquires all the appearances of truth ; that is, it becomes really probable in the highest degree. A fact, on the other hand, which is repugnant to experience, shocks us from the first ; and if we receive it afterwards for a true fact, we receive it on outward authority, not on inward conviction. Now to do so is extremely absurd ; since the same experience, that contradicts this particular fact, affirms this general fact, that men lie very often, and that their authority alone is a very frail foundation of assent.

It may seem a little extraordinary, and perhaps chimerical, to our first thoughts, to examine which is most conformable to experience, the eternity of the world, or the beginning of it in time; and it would be really so, if, to constitute this conformity to experience, it were strictly necessary, on every occasion, to cite a fact of similar kind. But there is no such necessity in the nature of things, and this conformity may be sufficiently constituted otherwise. Were it not so, our ignorance would produce very contrary effects, equally absurd; for this mother of superstitious credulity would be the mother likewise of most unreasonable incredulity.

THE probability of a fact, whereof there are frequent and notorious examples, may force our assent at once, like those which happen constantly in the ordinary course of things. But still it is true that a fact, of which we find no precise example within our knowledge, may have a conformity properly so called, with our experience. The probability arising from this sort of conformity will not be perceived, indeed, so soon as the other; but when it is perceived, will determine alike. This case may be compared to that of the mathematician, who arrives at truth by a long process of demonstration, and who can doubt of this truth afterwards, no more than he doubted of those self-evident truths which carry instantaneous conviction to the mind.

A FACT

A FACT may be, in the respect we speak of here, indifferent. We may discover, in our experience, none of the same sort; and yet none that imply contradiction with it. Such a fact, therefore, is merely new; and experience will be far from teaching us to reject any fact on this account alone. When such facts, therefore, new to us, according to the extent of our knowledge, but not so to other men, are attested by credible witnesses, he must act very unreasonably, who refuses to give that degree of assent to them, which is proportionable to the credibility of the witnesses. Again, the fact may be conformable to experience by a certain analogy physical or moral, if not by particular examples; and may be admitted therefore, on proper testimony: more easily still, than one of those which I called indifferent. One rests wholly on testimony, but experience gives to the other an indirect, if not a direct, confirmation.

LET me quote a story, which will serve to illustrate all I have been saying. A certain king of Siam was firmly persuaded that SOMMONA-CODOM had straddled over the gulph of Bengal; that the print of his right foot was seen at Pra-bat, and that of his left foot at Lanca. This pious legend was certainly repugnant to his majesty's experience, the first foundation of probability: and he fell into the absurdity of believing it on the most precarious of human authorities, the authority

thority of his priests, who had taught him, perhaps, that the merit of his faith in the legend of SOMMONA-CODOM increased as the probability of what it contained diminished. When the dutch ambaffador affured the fame prince that the furface of the water hardened fo much in his country, during the winter, that men, and beafts, and heavy carriages paffed over it, the prince treated him as a liar. He knew no example of this kind : and the feeming nonconformity to experience, in this cafe, had the effect which the real nonconformity to experience fhould have had in the other. I call this a feeming nonconformity ; becaufe altho the good Siamefe knew no example in point of what the ambaffador told him, yet he might have reflected on feveral particular objects of his knowledge, that would have brought it up to a real conformity. He knew, for I think the art of cafting cannon was known in his country, that extreme heat could give fluidity to the hardeft metals : from whence he might have concluded, very naturally, that extreme cold was capable of producing a very contrary effect, that of condensing and hardening fluid fubftances. In his country there was no ice ; but he knew that there fell fometimes on the neighbouring mountains of Ava, of Pegu, and of Laos, a certain white cold and folid fubftance which was nothing elfe than water, condensed and hardened in one feafon, and melting and flowing in another. He was a man of good fenfe, they fay ; and therefore we may believe that thefe confiderations difcovering

to

to him a real, tho not exact, conformity to his experience, he gave credit to the Dutchman afterwards.

LET us consider now, on our part, whether there are not facts that contain all that is necessary to establish the highest probability, tho there are no examples of the same, and tho' we should allow, that a bare non-repugnancy to experience, or a strong analogy to it, do not afford sufficient grounds of probability. Suppose then a fact, preserved in history or tradition, which has the two conditions of non-repugnancy and of analogy, and the contrary to which cannot be asserted without absurdity. If the negative be absurd, is it not agreeable to right reason that we adhere to the affirmative?

It may be said, perhaps, that the supposition I make cannot have place in historical facts, that these are in some sort arbitrary, they may be affirmed or denied, according to the credibility of the testimony. That JULIUS CAESAR conquered the Britons, or that GENGHIZ-CAN conquered China, may be true; but it may be true, likewise, that CAESAR was beat by the Britons, and that GENGHIZ-CAN did not even march into China. It may be said, that when such facts, as we meet with frequently in romances of all kinds, are concerned, we may affirm that the contrary is true, or that no such events ever happened; but that it will not follow that an historical

rical or traditional fact is true because it appears to us that to suppose the contrary is absurd. I enter no further into this disquisition, but I content myself to say that there is, at least, one such fact conveyed to us by tradition, the truth of which we must admit because it is absurd to assume the contrary, and because one or the other must be necessarily true. The fact I mean is this, that the world we inhabit had a beginning in time : and the same may be said of our whole solar system, and of the whole system of the universe. Now this fact being denied very dogmatically, and thereneither being, nor ever having been any living cotemporary human testimony for it or against it, we must, I think, be decided in this case by considering whether the beginning or eternity of the world implies any contradiction with what we know, or is repugnant to our clearest, most distinct, and best determined ideas. One of these facts must be true, since the world exists actually. If it can be shewn, therefore, that the opinion of it's eternity is an absurd opinion, I must be convinced that it had a commencement.

To prove the absurdity of the former, there seems to be a very obvious method, and an argument the more conclusive, because it is, in opposition to the atheist, an argument *ad hominem*, an argument drawn from the only solution of one of the greatest difficulties which the atheist proposes to him. If this solution be not good, he remains without a reply : and if it be
good,

good, as I think indeed that it is sufficient to answer this particular difficulty, there arises from it an argument against himself, much stronger than that which the theist opposed to him, and which I am ready to acknowledge that he has fully answered. What is here said requires to be explained by a deduction of particulars.

HE who denies the commencement, and asserts the eternity, of the world, must believe that this planet of ours has been, from all eternity, such as we see that it is. I say, that he must believe it to be so, since, if he admitted such changes in it as had overturned the whole order of physical nature, destroyed all the species of animals, and confounded all the elements in a new chaos, the dispute would be over, and he convicted, at once, of the grossest absurdity, because a God, a Δημιουργος, would be as necessary in this case, as in that of an original creation. In short, such a renewal of the world requiring no less wisdom and power than the formation of it, the dispute, on the atheist's part, would sink into a cavil about words. He is obliged therefore to maintain that this planet of ours has been always, upon the whole, much what it is; that there have been, from eternity, the same general laws, and the same order of physical nature; an infinite succession of material causes and effects, blind causes of uniform effects, uniform in kind, if not in degree; causes, which have been effects; effects, which become causes in their turn; and proceed in this manner

manner round the circle of eternity. When we quote to the atheist the universal consent of tradition in affirming that the world had a beginning, he laughs at the proof. Whether he has any right to do so, will be seen presently. In the mean time, we cannot be surprised that he, who rejects a demonstration, should pay no regard to a tradition; but we may be well surprised, when, following the atheist on, we find him calling tradition to his aid, and leaning wholly upon it.

If the world is eternal, why does our knowledge of it go no further back, why have we not more antient memorials, says the divine? The same reason, says the atheist, which hinders us from having records, where we have any, beyond two or three thousand years in a space of five or six thousand, to which, according to you, the antiquity of the world extends, is just as good to hinder us from seeing further backwards, in a longer, and even in an infinite, space of time. Now here theology comes in to the aid of atheism, as it does upon more occasions than this. The history, which is ascribed to the legislator of the Jews, and which it is required that we should believe implicitly, assures us that the world was once entirely drowned: and through the whole course of sacred, as well as profane, scriptures, we hear of other inundations, of earthquakes, of plagues, of devastations of countries, and of captivities of people; by all, or some of which, not only numbers of men have been destroyed, but whole political

litical societies have been lost. Thus the atheist has it in his power to make the same use of holy writ, which the divine makes of profane history; that is, he adopts whatever makes for his purpose, and rejects whatever does not. He finds antient governments frequently dissolved, and new ones rising. The records of the former, as well as their laws and customs, perish with them. The latter remain often very long in ignorance and barbarity, and have not the means, nor even the desire, of conveying the events of their own time, nor the traditions of former times, by authentic records to posterity. He will not fail to observe that all we know of antient history, except those broken scraps of it which jewish traditions mention, has come down to us from the Greeks; that many centuries passed, after the deluge, before CADMUS, or any one else, carried the use of letters to this people; and that this people, not having employed them to write history till many centuries afterwards, it is not astonishing that we know as little as we do concerning times more antient than those. The atheist triumphs in this answer to the divine: and tho no man abhors his cause more than I do, I think him thus far in the right. But the scene will soon change, if a theist interposes. His answer to the divine's question will indeed stand good, but out of this very answer there will arise a decisive argument against him.

WHEN the atheist has founded the deluge of
 DEUCALION

DEUCALION high, and admitted, for the sake of his argument, that of NOAH; when he has added to these, all those other deluges, of which tradition speaks, that of XISUTHRUS, that of OGYGES, that which the chinese annals mention, that whereof the priests of Sais informed SOLON, and that, if it was not the same, whereof the memory had been preserved among the people of America, besides a multitude of devastations of other kinds, he will think himself very strong. But the theist may ask him a very puzzling question Was there any thing supernatural in the production of these terrible catastrophes? The divine might answer, that there was; but he could not: for if he did, he would acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being, which he denies. It remains then that all he has said about the immutable order and laws of nature, which have maintained the world in much the same state, and such as it is, from eternity, must pass for nothing: and the theist will insist that, if such events as these, which tend directly to the dissolution of our planet, and the extermination of the whole human race, have been produced so often, in five or six thousand years, by the action of blind causes, matter and motion alone, it is repugnant to common sense to believe, either that such events have not happened an infinite number of times, in an infinite space of time; or that, having so happened, they should not have once destroyed the world entirely, and made the supposition of a God necessary to restore it to the state

in

in which we see it. The theist will insist further, against the atheist, that it is absurd to confine these phaenomena to such bounds, and to accompany them with just such circumstances, as suit his purpose. The purpose of the atheist required that these destructions of mankind should happen often enough to defend his hypothesis against that question, Why have we not more antient memorials of the world, and of the inhabitants of it? What his purpose required, is exactly answered by the eternal complaisance of blind material causes. The world was never entirely destroyed, nor mankind entirely exterminated, nor any necessity created of a God to restore them. But there have been as many of these destructions, as may be improved to extricate the atheist out of the difficulty which is laid in his way.

THE divine would sit down well satisfied with the state to which, I suppose, the dispute is reduced by the theist, if he had nothing more at heart, than to maintain the existence of God, by maintaining the commencement of the world. But he has something more at heart: it must have commenced, it must have been renewed, and it must have been repeopled, in the manner MOSES relates, and just at the time which he fixes, according to the calculations that learned men have grounded on the genealogies contained in the book of Genesis. For this purpose a system has been invented by crowding profane into the extent of sacred chronology, and by making as many anecdotes

dotes of the former, as can be so made, seem to coincide with those of the latter. Divines would be thought to prove the latter by concurrent evidence; but in reality they assume it to be true: and by this assumption alone can the violence, with which they drag profane anecdotes to their purpose, be in any sort excused. That I may not quote to you any of those numberless heavy writers, who have taken this task upon them, I will bring forward on this occasion Mr. DE MEAUX, the honor of the gallican, or rather of the christian church, and the shame of that of Rome. This writer, who possessed in the highest degree the talent of seducing the imagination, when he could not convince the judgment, running over, in his Discourse on universal history, those ages which succeeded the deluge, in a very agreeable manner, but on very precarious authority, makes no scruple of affirming that there is no antient history, wherein the marks of a new world do not appear manifestly in these early times, and long after them. These endeavours to confirm the mosaïc system by a multitude of uncertain traditions, as well as the history itself, compiled, no doubt, from other traditions, might be sufficient to take all authority from tradition, if these authors did not mistake the notion of it, and if a just distinction, that ought to be made, did not escape them.

TRADITION is first oral, the first author or authors of it unknown; and when it comes afterwards
into

into history, the genealogical descent of it is nothing more than tradition: and we must say, in general, very absurdly, that it proves itself; or, very truly, that it has no proof at all. From hence it follows that, particular circumstantial facts, conveyed to us by particular traditions, are destitute of historical proof. But still it will be agreeable to nature and reason, that the unanimous concurrence of many traditions, to which no contrary traditions can be opposed, may constitute the truth of a general fact. Public report, as PLINY the younger observes, relates facts in the gross, and naked of circumstances. So it must do, to deserve any credit; and so does this tradition, that the world had a beginning. It is rather a fact resulting from the concurrence of traditions, than a fact founded on the authority of any. Nothing can be less credible, than all that we read in antient story about the Assyrians, for instance. It is a wild heap of inconsistent traditions, which cannot be reconciled, nor verified for want of an historical criterion. CTESIAS, it is said, boasted that he had extracted the materials of his history, whilst he was in the service of the king of Persia, out of the authentic records of that monarchy. But his account, those of other greek writers, and even those of the Old testament, are so contrary to one another, and, on the whole, so improbable, that they may be all comprehended under the name of Assyriacs, which ARISTOTLE brought into proverbial use, and which was meant to signify all sorts of fabu-

lous relations. What are we now to believe in this case? Not any particular tradition, to be sure; but thus much in general, that there was an empire once founded in Asia, to which the Assyrians gave their name.

THESE traditions, those of Egypt, and many of Greece, come from those dark ages which may be called heroical or fabulous, after VARRO the most learned of the Romans. More modern Greeks, like echoes, repeated these traditions; and, in repeating, multiplied them all, so that the sound of them rings still in our ears, and they remain objects of learned curiosity. Shall we give credit now to the traditions, that came down from fabulous ages, about the expedition of the Argonauts; about the war of Thebes, and that of Troy; about the adventures of HERCULES, of THESEUS, and a multitude of other romantic stories? No, most certainly. It would be ridiculous to give credit to any of them. But it is not ridiculous, it is reasonable, to be persuaded that they had some foundation in the truth of things. Every tradition, considered apart, may be safely denied; because no one of them has an historical proof: but yet a truth, which may be called with little impropriety historical, results from the combination of all these fabulous traditions. There were no doubt, in unknown ages, maritime expeditions, famous leagues, cruel wars, and heroes who rendered their names illustrious.

ONE tradition reports that PERSEUS carried a colony into the east; another, that TITHONUS did the same “*usque ad Aethiopas*,” as far as the Indies. Is not the voyage of Io, the daughter of INACHUS, into Egypt long before, and the expedition of the Cimmerians into Asia long after, famous in tradition? Many others of the same kind might be mentioned: and tho they are all fabulous, they leave no reason to doubt that arts and sciences, and even barbarity, were carried from the west to the east, as well as from the east to the west, in ages quite unknown to us; which is enough to shake the authority of that particular history, wherein it is reported that the world was repopled from one spot, and by one family, after an universal deluge. But I need insist on this head no longer. So many general truths, of which it is impossible to doubt, result from the concurrence of fabulous traditions, that there remains no reason to doubt of the truth of this fact, “The world had a beginning.”

WILL it be said, that if there has been such a tradition, it has not been so universal as to establish this truth, according to my own rule? Lest this should be said, it is necessary that I prove the universality of it; and that by shewing, particularly, for what reasons we admit other facts to be true, tho founded only on tradition, it may appear that the beginning of the world is still better founded, and this important tradition advantageously distinguished from all others.

WHILST I am writing on this subject, to you, a dissertation I had never seen before is fallen into my hands. The author * of it pretends not only to prove that the world had a beginning, but also that this beginning was the same which MOSES gives it. He is so fond of the second proposition, that he employs all his skill and all his learning to establish it. He ventures to assert that the history of the world was very well known, when that of MOSES became public by the spreading of the gospel; that profane history agreed with sacred, in this respect, and did not reach beyond the bounds MOSES had set. One would think that these writers imagine, for this writer is a divine too, that none but themselves can read, and that they have still the advantage, which they had before the resurrection of letters, the advantage of imposing whatever they please on an ignorant world. The world had a beginning; tradition proves it had. But tradition is far from proving that it began, either in the manner MOSES relates, or at the time which he is thought to have fixed. Profane and sacred history were as little agreed, when christianity was published and the jewish scriptures were better known, as they are at this time; notwithstanding all the pains taken by JOSEPHUS, EUSEBIUS, and others, to reconcile them; and notwithstanding all the pains that have been taken, by modern scholars, to confirm sacred by profane anecdotes.

LET us neglect such writers, therefore, who

* JACQUELOT.

make

make a shew of learning, always futile, and often false. Let us examine and compare for ourselves; look into the authors they cite; but trust neither their citations nor their reasonings. DIODORUS the Sicilian, and STRABO, in the reign of AUGUSTUS; PLINY and PLUTARCH in those of VESPASIAN and TRAJAN, very respectable authors certainly, give us a different idea of their knowledge in the history of the world, from that which the author of this dissertation would give us. They knew a little better, than this modern writer, what histories and what traditions they had of any authenticity. They made no great account of those canticles or hymns, of those inscriptions and other expedients, which had been employed, in more early times, to preserve the memory of past events, and concerning which the writer we refer to enters into a chimerical and tiresome detail. These antient writers looked on their histories to be more modern, and their traditions to be more antient, than our tribe of scholars would make them, the last especially. That profound antiquity, wherein these men affect dogmatically to make great discoveries, with very particular and critical exactness, was, for the others, a dark abyss, wherein they saw but few objects, and those few rather general than particular, and on the whole very imperfect. They acknowledged that the first of the greek historians had writ no earlier than the time about which the Persians began to make their expeditions into Europe. They confessed that neighbouring nations had some historical monuments of a much greater antiquity; but they con-

ferred too, that these monuments were very imperfect and very precarious, broken into discordant anecdotes, and mingled up with romance and poetical fiction. In a word, they owned themselves able to pierce a very little way into antiquity : but none of them pretended that the bounds of their historical knowledge were the bounds of antiquity. Let us see now, whether the beginning of the world may not be, even at this time, reputed equivalent to the best established historical fact, notwithstanding the avowed ignorance of the most learned and curious enquirers, who wrote, two thousand years ago, about the beginning of nations, and much more of the world.

THE Egyptians seem to have been reputed the most antient, or one of the most antient, nations of the world, by the Greeks, from whom all our knowledge of profane history descends. They gave to their nation an immense antiquity, and in part, perhaps, fabulous. But I am at a loss, however, to discover what means, and therefore what right, the scholars of these ages have to decide as dogmatically, as they have done, about the egyptian dynasties. Why, for instance, the jesuit PETAVIUS required that we should, upon his word, reject them all? Or, why the author of the Dissertation, after touching the matter very lightly and very superficially, should expect to be believed, when he conjectures that there were no monuments of egyptian antiquity later than MOERIS, tho he has in this the authority of as great a man as MAR-

SHAM

SHAM on his side? DICEEARCHUS, the disciple of ARISTOTLE, who had not most certainly inspired him with much credulity in antient traditions, had studied the antiquities of Egypt. MANETHO had done the same in the time of PTOLEMY PHILADELPHUS, and ERATOSTHENES, in the time of PTOLEMY EVERGESTES. The first of the two was himself an Egyptian, and had extracted his chronology and history from the books of MERCURY, that is, from the sacred and most authentic writings of the Egyptians. Why has his chronology been called in question, or why was it not received by christian writers beyond a certain epocha? Is there any pretence to say that he altered what he found in the books of MERCURY; as we know that JULIUS AFRICANUS, and EUSEBIUS, altered and transposed his dynasties, to make them, as near as they could, conformable to the mosaic chronology? With what front can we suspect the authenticity of books, compiled and preserved by egyptian priests, when we receive the Old testament on the faith of jewish scribes, a most ignorant and lying race? Were the sacred books of the Egyptians taken from them, by a king of Persia? DIODORUS says it. But the same DIODORUS assures us that the Egyptians purchased their scriptures again, and that they were restored to them by the eunuch BAGOAS: whereas the scriptures of the Jews were lost, more than once; and how they were recovered, the last time at least, is unknown to us: nay, whether they were recovered at all, in a strict sense may be, and has been, questioned by some Christians

Christians and Jews too. Is the immense antiquity, which MANETHO ascribed to his nation, or the tales of OSIRIS, and ISIS, and TYPHON, too ridiculous to be admitted? I shall not plead in favor of them. But, in truth, are the anecdotes of jewish antiquity a whit more conformable to experience, to reason, and to all our notions of things divine or human, whatever regard we may pay to some passages in the Pentateuch, because of the use to which they are put by theology. No man, who has the least pretence to candor, and who dares speak out, will assert so much. But still, how little credit soever we may give to the particular traditions of either sort, all of them together are the general voice of antiquity, and extort our assent to this truth, “The world had a beginning.”

THIS truth seems to have been propagated by them in those hieroglyphs, and that sacred language, wherein they recorded whatever was most antient and most respected. HORUS, or the world, was represented like a youth whose beard was not yet grown. An egg was the famous symbol of the generation, as well as figure, of the world; and the Thebans, who were the most antient egyptian dynasty, had an hieroglyphical representation of the Divinity with an egg coming out of his mouth; which symbol of an egg was adopted by the Phenicians, and by the Persians, and became an object of worship in the orgia, or mysteries of BACCHUS. These monuments came down from the first MERCURY, at whose antiquity we cannot
so

so much as guess; for the second, who followed, and probably very long after him, our chronologers are obliged to place as high as the age of MOSES or of JOSHUA.

SANCHONIATHON, that we may say something of phenician as well as egyptian traditions of this sort, is another author that may vie, perhaps, with the most antient for antiquity. BOCHART, and all our divines, think fit to place him in the time of GIDEON. It is not convenient for them that he should stand backwarder. They build their assertion on a passage concerning him in the writings of PORPHYRY, who says, that SANCHONIATHON had the materials of his history from JEROMBAL, a priest of the god JAO. Now JEROMBAL sounds too like to JERUBBAAL, the name GIDEON wears in scripture, and JAO sounds too like JEHOVAH, to leave any doubt on this subject in the minds of men who can make systems and write volumes on the affinity of sounds. SANCHONIATHON then, being cotemporary to GIDEON, had a knowledge of the books of MOSES, and took from thence all he knew concerning the beginning of the world; so that these two are but one and the same tradition, according to this opinion. But there is great reason to doubt of the first part, and the second is evidently false.—The anachronism of PORPHYRY, who supposed SEMIRAMIS cotemporary with the siege of Troy, will not make SANCHONIATHON cotemporary with GIDEON: since the last was, unluckily, not a priest, and
since

since the JEROMBAL, from whose writings the phenician historian is said to have borrowed, was one. The answers made to this objection are trifling. A pagan, it is said, might take a general of an army for a priest: and PORPHYRY was guilty of this blunder. The Jews called their chiefs or principal men sometimes priests, it is said. Therefore PORPHYRY, who was no more a Jew than he was a Christian, might make use of an appellation peculiar to the Jews. But, further, in what time soever SANCHONIATHON lived, he did not relate what he said concerning the commencement of the world from the mosaic history, or any other jewish traditions; since he affirmed positively that he derived his cosmogony from TAAUT or MERCURY. Have we not reason to be surpris'd, as much as we are accustomed to it, at the boldness of scholars who presume to oppose their frivolous conjectures to what an historian himself says of the memorials which he followed?—The second part of what is said concerning this phenician historian being false, it follows that SANCHONIATHON, one of the most antient writers whose name is come down to us, that SANCHONIATHON, a lover and follower of truth, according to the etymology of his name, learned and curious in searching the original of things, furnished with the most authentic materials that Egypt and Phoenicia could afford him, and writing in an age when the authenticity of these materials might be known, affirmed the beginning of the world; and is, therefore, a voucher of the same truth, distinct from MOSES.

WHE-

WHETHER the books of the Pentateuch were writ by MOSES himself, or whether the traditions contained in them were compiled after his time, which is not at all improbable; certain it is, that these traditions are of very great antiquity. Now these traditions confirm the same general fact, in a more circumstantial account of it, than we may suppose that SANCHONIATHON gave. I have read that SIMPLICIUS laughed at the whole story, and at GRAMMATICUS for quoting some passages of it. This interpreter of ARISTOTLE affirmed, that the whole was taken from egyptian fables. But SIMPLICIUS might have considered, as we do, that how ridiculous soever the circumstances might be, the fact, affirmed by so many traditions, might be true, tho he was led to deny it by arguments which ARISTOTLE himself owned to be very problematical. ARISTOTLE, who employed logic very absurdly in physics, might employ it, as absurdly, about history and tradition. Let it be, that the account MOSES gives of the creation, and the cosmogony of SANCHONIATHON, are alike fabulous; yet still the general fact, advanced by them, may be reputed true. The various fables annexed to it do, in effect, prove it; since it is not likely that they would have been invented, if the foundation of them had not been laid in tradition, if there had not been a stock of truth whereon to graft them.

I AM as much persuaded, as SIMPLICIUS himself, that the Israelites might borrow some egyptian traditions,

ditions, as it is notorious that they borrowed many civil and religious institutions from the same people. I can believe too, on the faith of learned men, that there is some analogy between the mosaic account of the creation and the phenician cosmogony. There is nothing extraordinary to alter the state of the question in this. I can believe too, that the six times, in which God made the world, according to an antient tradition of the Persians, are relative to the six days in which he made it, according to the jewish traditions. The Israelites had been slaves to the Egyptians, captives among the Chaldeans, and subjects to the Persians. They boasted their descent from ABRAHAM; and the magi acknowledged this patriarch for their legislator, and for the institutor of their religion. The reformation, which ZOROASTER made in this, was made after the return of some of the Jews from Babylon into their own country. But it was made, according to HIDE and other modern critics, in the reign of DARIUS, son of HYSTASPES, a little before ESDRAS and NEHEMIAS went from the court of Persia to restore the religion, to settle the government, and to compile the traditions of the Jews at Jerusalem. ESDRAS set out from Persia and Babylonia when the disputes between the magians and the sabians ran the highest, and when the new doctrines of ZOROASTER prevailed in the first fervor of reformation. ESDRAS, therefore, and the other Jews, who could not fail to be favorable to the first sect, and averse to the latter, might very well take, as it is highly probable that they

they did, the names of the months, the names of angels, many ridiculous anecdotes, and, among the rest, some concerning the creation, from the magians. The tradition was common to all these nations, but they invented, and they borrowed from one another, various circumstances, in which they dressed it up differently, each historian according to his fancy, and conformable to the established system of his religion. This hypothesis is so well founded, and so very probable, that our divines do nothing better than weaken the credibility of the fact, when they assume, on the similitude of some circumstances, that this tradition, as well as the belief of one God, was preserved by the Jews alone.

THEY were both much more antient among the Persians than ZOROASTER or ZERDUSHT. We have to do here only with the first: and as to that, PORPHYRY cites, in his treatise *De antro nympharum*, a certain EUBULUS, who writ the history of MITHRAS, and assured in it that ZOROASTER consecrated a round grotto, such as nature had formed it, adorned with flowers and watered by springs, to MITHRAS, the creator of all things; which grotto was the symbol of the world, as the world is the work of MITHRAS. The same reformer instituted festivals likewise to commemorate the beginning of it: and not content with this he descended into particulars; fixed the number of days contained in every one of the six times
that

that had been imagined; and marked the gradual progress of the creation in each of them.

THE Chaldeans may be coupled, on this occasion, with the Persians, as the Phenicians and the Israelites were with the Egyptians. They were all distinct nations; they had all their distinct religions and traditions; but they all agreed in one, the beginning of the world, how many different fictions soever they might relate concerning the time and manner of this beginning. I do not cite the chaldaic oracles. They were as much forged or corrupted, perhaps, as the sibylline verses. But we have no need of leaning on their authority. EUSEBIUS has preserved a remarkable passage that was in the history of BEROSUS. An antient tradition of the Chaldeans reported, that our world was formed out of a chaos. All was night and water, til BEL cut this night in two, separated the heavens from the earth, and formed the world. The stars, the sun, the moon, and the planets, were the productions, according to this tradition, of the same BEL, by which name the Chaldeans meant to signify the KNEPH of the orthodox Egyptians, their own invisible MITHRAS, or, in one word, the Supreme Being.

I KNOW very well that DIODORUS says, the Chaldeans believed the world eternal by it's nature, and incapable of generation or corruption. But, in the first place, the authority of BEROSUS seems to deserve, on this occasion, much more credit

credit than that of DIODORUS, not only because he was much nearer to the times of which he speaks, but because he was a babylonian and a priest, and, therefore, better instructed without doubt, than the latter, in the traditions of his own country: In the next place the difficulty of reconciling these two authors does not seem insuperable. The Greek; in the beginning of his first book, speaks of those who believed the world eternal, and of those who were of a contrary opinion. But this dispute seems to have risen among the naturalists or the learned, as he calls them, and not among those who contented themselves to know, about past events, what the history and tradition of their country taught them. Thus we may understand, and should, I think, understand, what he says of the Chaldeans, for after having said that they maintained the eternity of the world, and believed it incapable of generation or corruption, he adds, that they believed the world to be governed by a divine providence, and every thing, which happened, to be ordered by the gods, not to happen by chance. Now the greatest part of what he says being manifestly an account of philosophical opinions, and not of facts preserved in history or in tradition, it seems most natural to understand the whole in the same manner: besides which, it is to be considered that there might be a tradition of the commencement, and that there could be none of the eternity, of the world. From all which it seems evident to me, that the whole of what DIODORUS says is applicable to philosophical

opinions alone, which are sometimes opposed to matters of fact sufficiently established; whereas every such hypothesis should have it's foundation in fact, not to be chimerical. BEROSUS relates what he found in the chaldaic traditions; and DIODORUS tells us what the opinions were of some philosophers at least. We shall see presently, that this opposition of a philosophical hypothesis to tradition was not confined to Egypt or Chaldaea, and that it does not affect the truth of the proposition we defend.

STRABO relates, in his fifteenth book, that the brachmans in India agreed with the Greeks in many things, and particularly in this, that “the world had a beginning;” to which he adds, and that “it will be destroyed.” Advantage may be taken from hence to turn my own way of reasoning against me. It may be said, that, since the brachmans believed the future destruction of the world, which could not be the subject of any tradition, and was not certainly revealed to them by prophecy, the assumed commencement of the world might be, and certainly was, merely founded, as well as it's assumed destruction, on their philosophical speculations. It may be said, that we ought to explain this passage of STRABO much as I have explained that of DIODORUS, and to suppose the whole system of these indian brachmans philosophical.

I SHALL have occasion to consider, more at length,

length, the true difference between a tradition of opinion, and a tradition of fact. But, in the mean time, I observe, that since the opinion of the future destruction of the world, founded manifestly in speculation, was entertained by the Greeks, at the same time as the opinion of it's beginning, founded not less manifestly in tradition; and since STRABO assures us that there was a great conformity between the opinions of the Greeks, and the opinions of the Indians, we may well believe that there was the same conformity between the principles on which their opinions were framed. Those among the Greeks, who believed the world had a beginning, believed it on the faith of tradition. They who imagined it would have an end, were led to imagine so both by physical and metaphysical speculation. Since they were sure it had a beginning, they concluded from both that it would have an end, and grafted opinion on fact. Thus it happened among the Greeks, and thus it might happen among the Indians.

I OBSERVE, in the next place, that if there was any author of equal authority, who asserted that the brachmans believed the eternity of the world, to oppose to STRABO, as we have BEROSUS to oppose to DIODORUS, this circumstance might afford some pretence to say that the brachmans, having framed, from observations of the present state of the material world, an opinion that it would be some time or other destroyed by age or accident, were led from thence, by carrying their

speculations backwards, to the opinion that it had a beginning: but that, as there is no such authority to oppose to STRABO, we ought to conclude that the knowledge they had by tradition of the beginning of the world led them to believe, on physical observation, and metaphysical reasoning, it's future destruction; rather than to conclude this philosophical conjecture led them to imagine, without any foundation in tradition, that the world had a beginning. So that I might very well quote the Indians, as an antient nation who concurred in establishing the truth of this fact on the faith of their traditions.

I MIGHT go further on to the eastward, and bring the testimony of the Chinese, on the same side: a most antient nation surely, and possessed of more antient records, perhaps, than any other, tho we have been little acquainted till very lately with their history, chronology, and traditions. But I chuse to proceed in quoting authors better known to us, and shall therefore cite once more STRABO, whose authority of all the antient writers, is perhaps of the greatest weight. STRABO represents the Ethiopians rather barbarous than civilised; and yet this people believed a supreme immortal Being, the first cause of all things. This people therefore believed the beginning of the world; and this people could not fail to have most antient traditions, since, as rude as they were, the use of letters had been known by them from a time immemorial. Enough has been said of the
most

most antient nations that are mentioned in history : and if we descend to the Greeks, modern with respect to them, tho antient with respect to us, we shall find the same tradition established, and further reasons to persuade that it was universal, allegorised, disguised, disputed, and even weakened by time ; but still universally received and strongest as we remount highest in our inquiries after it. Such it was when the Greeks, from whom it has descended to us, adopted and transmitted it. This tradition seems to rise out of the abyss of time with the impetuosity of a great source. But then as the water, which spouted out with much noise and force in the beginning, runs silently and gently on, the further it runs ; so this tradition grew weaker, but continued to run, when the authors, whom we read at this time, began to write.

THE Egyptians were the first masters of the Greeks. Before any of these went into Egypt to acquire science, they had received much instruction from thence ; principles of religion and of civil government, and anecdotes of antiquity. ORPHEUS may pass for the first of these egyptian missionaries ; since he came from Egypt, tho he was a Thracian. I abandon the verses, which have gone under his name, as easily as the chaldaic oracles ; but that I should believe there was no such man, is too much to require. ARISTOTLE asserted, as we learn in the first book Of the nature of the gods, “ ORPHEUM “ poëtam nunquam fuisse.” But we find, in the same treatise, that ORPHEUS, MUSAEUS, HESIOD,

and HOMER, were reckoned among the most antient poets. It would not be difficult, perhaps, to discover the principle of philosophical interest which induced ARISTOTLE to deny the existence of a man so famous in all the traditions of his country, and who had been the subject of so many fables. What traditions of greater antiquity than ORPHEUS the Greeks might have, we know not. But he was, certainly, the principal channel, through which that of the commencement of the world passed, from the Egyptians to MUSAEUS, HESIOD, and HOMER, who received first, or were confirmed in the belief of it, by this authority, and who preserved and propagated it in all their songs. PYTHAGORAS took it from the Egyptians likewise, and from other eastern nations. The whole italic school, and all those of the ionic, who did not prefer their own speculations to a matter of fact, and PLATO, the famous founder of the academy, followed them. None of these invented the fact; but all of them dressed it up and delivered it down in different garbs, according to their different systems of philosophy and religion. Even the Christians, who came so long afterwards, helped to corrupt this tradition, by interpolating the famous verses, ascribed to ORPHEUS, which I have for this reason, among others, consented to lay aside; tho still, if we believe these verses were composed by ONOMACRITUS, and not by ORPHEUS, they were composed at least as early as the age of PISISTRATUS, and contain therefore a very antient tradition.

I MIGHT have named, as the preservers of this tradition, among the Greeks, LINUS, THAMYRAS, and others. I might quote several Theogonias, that, it is said, were writ like that of ARISTEAS of the island of Proconnesus, or that of EPIMENIDES of the island of Crete; all which would have been more ridiculous, than they were, if the beginning of the world had not been established in general belief: but I will mention, particularly, that of HESIOD only. He invokes the muses to sing the divine race of those immortal gods born of the earth, of the heavens, and of night, and who have been nourished by the salt sea. He goes on to bid them sing, how the gods and the earth were first made, with the rivers and the immense sea, with the stars and the heavens, with the gods who proceeded from them, and who were the authors of all good things. The same extravagant ideas are to be found in HOMER. The ocean was, according to him, the original of all things: and this notion coincides with that of THALES, who taught that all things proceeded from water as their material principle; by which he meant, no doubt, a certain chaos, wherein all the elements were confounded, till they were reduced into order, that is, till the world began.

THE proofs of the universality of this tradition, muffled up almost always in allegories and fables, are so numerous, that we run more risk of being lost in the multiplicity of them, than of wanting

any. ABARIS, the scythian, had writ concerning these generations of gods. The world was not eternal in the system of the druids; and the antient Etrurians had their fables concerning the beginning of it, as well as the Egyptians and the Persians. The magi, says DIAGENES LAERTIUS, taught the generation of the gods: and by these gods they understood fire, earth, and water. One of the magi, says HERODOTUS, sung the same generation, in an hymn, at all the sacrifices of the Persians.

As poetry personified every thing, antient philosophy, which was little else than poetry, animated all the elements; and every part of corporeal nature was filled with inferior divinities: for they acknowledged some that were superior, and even a Supreme Being, who, far from being born of the world, made it, and was the father of gods and men: which puts me in mind of a passage of CICERO, where it is said, of this Supreme Being, “*deos alios in terra, alios in luna, alios in reliquas mundi partes spargens Deus quasi ferebat.*”

It would have been very convenient for all the atheistical philosophers to have assumed the eternity of the world; but few of them durst do so, in opposition to this universality of tradition. They were obliged, therefore, either to reject this tradition, or to find some way of accounting for the existence of our planet, without supposing a self-existent Ἀρχιτεκτων, or architect, the first mind of

ANAXA-

ANAXAGORAS. They chose the last, as the most easy task: and EPICURUS seemed to think his absurd system more likely to prevail, for this very reason, because it assumed that the world had a beginning conformably to tradition. The author of the dissertation I have before me asserts that all the philosophers, except the Epicureans, under which name he comprehends all the atomic philosophers, held that the world was eternal. A passage in the beginning of the fourth chapter of the treatise of CENSORINUS, *De die natali*, led him into this error. What he advances may be proved false by a deduction of many particulars; but this may be said with truth, that an opinion of the eternity of the world grew up or spread more after ARISTOTLE. Even the latter Platonicians took part on this head with the Peripatetics. They treated their master, as St. JEROM accuses others, and might have been accused himself, of treating the scriptures. Whatever new opinions philosophers framed, they dragged in the text of their masters to support them: which calls to my mind the proceedings of a Jew and of a stoical philosopher. PHILO found a trinity of divine hypostases in the writings of PLATO. He adopted the opinion, would needs find it in the sacred writings of his fathers, and reconcile the legislator of the Jews with the founder of the academy. Just so CLEANTHES endeavoured to make the fables of ORPHEUS, MUSAEUS, HESIOD, and HOMER, agree with what he taught concerning the gods, “*Ut veterrimi poetæ, qui haec ne suspicati quidem sint, stoici fuisse*”
“ vide-

“videantur *.” But, after all, nothing can be more strongly asserted, than the commencement of the world is by PLATO; and even ARISTOTLE himself acknowledged that this philosopher thought it generated.

It may seem strange, but it is true, that we have a right to quote ARISTOTLE himself against the eternity of the world. He falls severely on the philosophical systems, that prevailed in his time, about the manner in which it began: but he acknowledges the uniformity of this antient tradition. How could he avoid to do so? Or how could it be otherwise, since the Greeks, in his time, had found it established among all the nations with whom they became acquainted either by commerce or by war? That happened to them, which has happened to us, in much later ages. We have pushed our discoveries through both hemispheres, and have found every where the same tradition established in the belief of mankind. The Chinese, whom I just mentioned above, would pass, like the Egyptians of old, for the most antient race of mankind, and they have traditions and records of immense antiquity and very singular authenticity. Now these traditions and these records agree, in one general fact, with all those that have been mentioned, “the world and mankind had a beginning.” Even the name of a first man is preserved, and FOHI, who was the ORHPEUS of the east, precedes a very little their historical age. If

* TULLY De nat. Deor l. ii.

we cross the South-sea, and visit the people of Peru or of Mexico, we find the same tradition established by universal consent, as they received it from their fathers. The world began, and PACHA CAMAC created it : the sun that enlightens the world now, is not eternal ; there have been other suns before this. If we cross the continent of America and proceed to the islands, we find the inhabitants of them in the same belief ; at least we might have found them so, whilst they preserved the primitive simplicity of their manners, and the traditions of their forefathers, and till spanish avarice and spanish bigotry had exterminated the whole species.

AFTER saying so much concerning this tradition, it is necessary, I think, to consider, more particularly, what those principles are, on which reason determines us to receive general facts that have no foundation out of tradition, as we receive the most authentic historical truths. I have touched this subject already : but, to treat it with more order and clearness, let us descend into some detail of the essential differences between history and tradition. Let us consider what those attributes are which the latter wants, and for the want of which this testimony cannot produce historical probability : for if we find that there is not the same necessity of relation between these attributes and the general facts, spoken of here, as there is between these attributes and every historical account of past events ; in short, if we find that such general facts are not in the case of those, in order
to

to judge of which the rules of historical criticism have been established, it will follow that these facts may be received for true, as well as any, and much better than several of those that are contained in history, and to the truth of which we assent.

A STORY, circumstantially related, ought not to be received on the faith of tradition; since the least reflection on human nature is sufficient to shew how unsafely a system of facts and circumstances can be trusted for it's preservation to memory alone, and for it's conveyance to oral report alone; how liable it must be to all those alterations, which the weakness of the human mind must cause necessarily, and which the corruption of the human heart will be sure to suggest. An event that is not circumstantially, is imperfectly related, not only with respect to the communication it should give, but with respect to the means we should have to judge of it's probability. The means I speak of are those of comparing the different parts of a story together, and of examining how well they coincide and render the whole consistent. In one case, then, different circumstances are to be compared; in the other, all the traditions that can be collected on the same subject. Inconsistent circumstances destroy the credit of the story; repugnant traditions, that of a general event. But the silence of some histories or of some traditions will destroy the credit of neither, when all those who speak of the same thing agree. The jewish history has preserved the memory of a babylonian kingdom, which

which we call the second empire of the Assyrians, unknown to profane history and tradition, which make mention only of one. That antient monument too of RHAMSES, which GERMANICUS went to see in his voyage into Egypt, and the inscription on it, which contained the names of all the nations whom this prince had conquered in Asia, makes no mention of the Assyrians among those who became tributary to the egyptian empire; as if their very name had not been known a century before the aera of NABONASSAR; tho it mentions the Persians, the Bactrians, and others, who must have been such to the Assyrians, if an assyrian empire had been established, as we assume, before the aera of NABONASSAR. Notwithstanding this silence, and the vain efforts of scholars to reconcile sacred and profane assyriacs, it would be unreasonable to deny that there was an assyrian empire in Asia. Upon the whole matter, that “the world had a beginning,” is a general fact, even better founded than this, “there has been an assyrian monarchy.” Some antient traditions, we have seen, do not concur with others about the latter. But I presume it would be hard to cite any body of antient traditions, wherein the commencement of the world is not directly affirmed, or constantly supposed. There is not even the silence of tradition against it; and as to traditions that deny the fact, there neither have been, nor could be, any.

It may be thought, and it is true in general, that history has this advantage over tradition. The
 authors

authors of authentic history are known; but those of tradition, whether authentic or unauthentic, are not known. The probability of facts must diminish by length of time, and can be estimated, at no time, higher than the value of that original authority from which it is derived. This advantage, then, authentic history has, which no tradition can have. The degree of assent, which we give to history, may be settled, in proportion to the number, characters, and circumstances of the original witnesses; the degrees of assent to tradition cannot be so settled. Let us see, therefore, how far this difference may be thought to affect the tradition of the beginning of the world. We shall find, I think, that we are very liable to be deceived in all these respects which should constitute the authenticity of history, and that the difference I have observed cannot affect, in any sort, the true fact I assert.

WE are deceived, grossly, very often about the number of witnesses, two ways. Sometimes by applying testimonies that have no true relation to the things testified, and sometimes by taking different repetitions of the same testimony, for different testimonies. Both these ways are employed with success, artfully by some, habitually by others; and numerous citations improperly brought, and carelessly or ignorantly set to account, to increase the confusion and to promote the deception. Nothing can be more ridiculous, perhaps, than to see a great part of what we find in profane antiquity

quity applied to confirm what we find in sacred. Numerous and astonishing examples of this kind might be brought from all the writers who have endeavoured to establish the authenticity of jewish, by a supposed concurrence of profane, traditions. But I pass these over. It is full as ridiculous to see all the antient writers, who have spoke of the Assyrians and Persians, quoted as so many distinct witnesses, when they did, for the most part, nothing more than copy CTESIAs, first, and one another, afterwards. Neither CTESIAs, nor MOSES himself, may deserve belief in all the particulars related by them; but CTESIAs may be reckoned as a witness the more of some general facts, as MOSES may be of some others.

THAT the world had a beginning is a naked fact, which neither contains nor implies any thing equivocal. It neither leans on the authority of one nation, nor of one system of traditions, which many nations may adopt. Nations, the most distant in place, and the most opposite in opinions, customs, and manners, concur in affirming it. All these traditions, therefore, have had different originals, or they all proceed from one original tradition. If they had different originals, the truth of the fact is established by so great a number of independent testimonies. If they all proceed from one original tradition, the truth of the fact is established just as well; since such a tradition must have been that of one first family or society. As it would be absurd to assume that a tradition, which
may

may be called that of mankind, could be founded originally in any thing else than the truth of a fact which concerned all mankind, and of which all mankind had once had a certain assurance ; so it would be absurd to suppose that a tradition, arising in one family or society alone, could spread to all the corners of the earth, and be received alike by nations even unknown to one another, unless we suppose this family or society to be that from which all these nations, by whom this tradition was preserved, proceeded. It does not seem that this argument can be eluded.

As there is a great difference between circumstantial relations and general naked facts, so there is, likewise, between the tradition I contend for, and every other of the same kind. That there has been an universal deluge is a fact, as general and as naked as this, “the world had a beginning;” but I apprehend, that the tradition of it is not supported like that of the commencement of the world. Has the memory of this event been preserved among all the antient nations? There are men bold enough to say so; but the contrary is true. The tradition of NOAH’S deluge is vouched by no other authority than that of MOSES: for those nations, which preserved the memory of so many particular deluges, knew nothing of this universal deluge ; and yet it is impossible to conceive that the memory of such a catastrophe should have been known only by one people, and that not the most antient neither ; or, being known to
all,

all, should have been preserved only in one corner of the earth. If this tradition then is liable to suspicion, for want of a sufficient number of testimonies, that of the commencement of the world is liable to no suspicion; because it has as many testimonies as can be expected on the supposition of it's truth. Let us proceed now to consider the veracity and probity of witnesses, and the difference between history and tradition on this head. History to be authentic must give us not only the means of knowing the number, but of knowing the characters, of the witnesses who vouch for it. Tradition in general gives us the means of knowing neither: and the particular tradition we speak of here, which is that of nations, not of men, does not stand in need of the latter.

THIS condition of historical probability is even more important than the number of witnesses; and it is by this that we are most liable to be deceived. There are certain follies which prevail sometimes like epidemical maladies, and infect whole nations with their delirium. Such there were, of one sort, among the Egyptians; such there were, of another sort, among the Jews; and the predestination to universal empire may pass for another, among the Romans. But whatever various effects different deliriums may produce in different countries, there is one which they produce alike in all, the spirit of inventing, believing, and propagating lies. These lies come soon to have education and authority on their side. It becomes the interest of par-

particular men, or of particular societies, to profit of the public credulity: and when they have once done so, their lies produce such effects, under the management of bold and artful men, as sober truth never could. Thus MAHOMET, to go no higher, instituted a new religion in the seventh century of ours, and founded a great empire. MAHOMET had intrepidity as well as address: and if a miserable Jew of Asia minor, seventy or eighty years ago, had not wanted the former, we might have seen, very possibly, at this hour, a new spiritual and temporal empire established by the adorers of a new Messiah. But the courage of SABATAI SEVI, to whom the Jews resorted from all parts, in a firm persuasion that he was their true Messiah, failed him, and he passes for an impostor, merely because he durst not stand an impalement. Thus not only lies, but whole systems of lies, get into history; pass for religious truths; and serve to support, by appeals to them in after-times, the original fraud. MAHOMET was obliged to fly from Mecca to Medina by the unbelieving Arabs. But the Arabs now, and all those who have been converted to mahometism (for it would be false to say, tho we hear it continually said, that this religion has been propagated by force alone, and not by persuasion) go very devoutly in pilgrimage to the place from which he was driven; and the time of his flight is become their sacred aera.

I DWELL the longer on this point, because it is
that

that which justifies historical pyrrhonism the most. The antient manner of recording events made it easy to practise all these frauds. The priests in Egypt, in Judea, and elsewhere, were entrusted to make and to keep these records: and they were under a double obligation, if I may say so, for such they thought it no doubt, to keep them with greater regard to the system of religion, whose ministers they were, than to the truth of things. They were to keep up the credit of antient lies, and to invent as many new ones, as were necessary to propagate the same fraud. By these means, and on these motives, the whole of history was corrupted in those nations, as we shall easily believe that it could not fail to be, when we consider the connexity between civil and ecclesiastical affairs, and their mutual influence on one another. JOSEPHUS, writing against APPION, praises this manner of preserving the memory of things, in order to bespeak approbation to the practice, which was that of his own country. He boasts much of the sincerity, and even of the inspiration, if I mistake not, of the jewish scribes. But good sense, founded in experience, will answer that they who record matters, concerning which they are strongly biassed by their affections, their passions, and their prejudices, and wherein they have directly, or indirectly, an immediate and great private interest to serve by inventing falsehoods, or by disguising truth, are never to be received as good witnesses, unless their testimony be confirmed by collateral and disinterested evidence. That they are not to be received

as such, on any other terms, we need go no further than the Jews themselves for examples. Some of their heroes and heroines may be thought justly, when we consider the anachronisms and the blunders they commit, as fictitious as *AMADIS* of Gaul, and their traditions no more authentic than those of archbishop *TURPIN*.

THE uncertainty of history arises principally from the causes here laid down. We are less liable to be deceived by the concurrence of authors, more independent and more indifferent than these, tho they may not be all of equal credit: because when their motives and designs are not the same, when they had no common principle, and when they cannot be suspected to have had any concert together, nothing but the notoriety of facts can make their relations coincide. In such cases a nice examination of the veracity and probity of historians, when we can make it, is as little necessary as it is in matters of tradition, where we cannot make it. We may subscribe, at least as reasonably, to the united testimony of a great number of traditions, whose authors are unknown to us, as we may to facts reported by a great number of historians, tho the authority of some of these would be otherwise very precarious.

EXPERIENCE shews sufficiently that there is no falsehood too gross to be imposed on any people civilised or barbarous, learned or ignorant: but we shall never conceive that the same lie could be

be imposed on all people ; because it is impossible that the same lie should flatter them all alike, or be equally well proportioned to the interest and designs of a prevalent society in every nation. What immediate or necessary relation has the beginning of the world to the predominant folly of the Egyptians, for instance or the Chinese, or to the interest of the priests among the former, and any of the several sects among the latter ? Since they believed the world to have had a beginning, it was very conformable to the folly of these two people to insist that they descended from the first men, and were the most antient nations of the world ; but what need had they to assume the commencement of it ? Would they not have flattered their vanity more to say, that it was eternal, and that their race was co-eternal with it ? Once more. What necessary relation had the beginning of the world to the favorite principle of the Jews, who believed themselves a people chosen by God out of all the people of the earth ? Could the eternity of the world make it less likely that they descended from SEM, or the vocation of ABRAHAM more improbable, or destroy the credibility of any fact that flattered their vanity ? I confess, I think not. If it be said, that this nation had nobler ideas of the Supreme Being than any other ; and that it was more conformable to these ideas to believe that the world was made by God, than that it is eternal as well as he ; I might deny the first proposition, and shew that no nation had such mean ideas of the Divinity in many respects

as this. But if I admitted it, for argument's sake, I might ask how this philosophical opinion could be passed for a matter of fact on the Egyptians, who boasted so much of their own antiquity, by a people, who had grown up among them, and who had been so long their slaves? If this tradition of the beginning of the world had prevailed among the Jews first, who were known to few people, and despised by those that knew them, how came it to spread far and wide, to the utmost extremities of the east and west? Since I have named the west, let me mention the Peruvians, and ask how the beginning of the world can be said to have flattered the general folly of this people, or the particular interest of their incas? They thought their incas the children of the sun. To what purpose was it to make them believe that PACHA CAMAC was a being superior to the sun, and that he created the world? Would it not have been more agreeable to the prejudices of the Peruvians, and to the interests of the incas, to have supposed the world eternal, and themselves the offspring of an eternal father?

LIES, that are produced by the predominant passions of people, and by the policy of those who lead them, carry for the most part on their fronts, if I may say so, the marks of their original: and this observation will hold in a multitude of instances that may be brought from history and tradition, both from facts circumstantially related, and from those that are naked, or almost naked, of circumstances. But the tradition that affirms the beginning

ning of the world is not in this case. It is relative no more to the particular character of one people than of another. It favors no more one general principle of religion or policy than another. In a word, force your imagination as much as you please, you will find insurmountable difficulties in your way, if you suppose the fact invented : but all these difficulties vanish when you suppose it true. The universal consent of mankind follows naturally and necessarily the truth of the fact. The antiquity of the tradition is a consequence of the antiquity of the world, and the great variety of fables, which have been invented about it, is a circumstance that accompanies every event that has descended long in oral tradition, and that has not been ascertained by cotemporary history, nay, even some that seemed to have been so ascertained.

THERE remains, to be spoken of, another condition of historical probability, which it may be supposed that tradition cannot have, and which we have seen, in the case of numbers, and veracity, or probity of witnesses, that history itself does not always furnish, and for want of which we are often imposed upon by it. This condition is so essential, that neither the numbers nor characters of witnesses will constitute probability without it. The condition I mean is this : that the original authors were not only cotemporary but competent witnesses. The examination whether they were such or no may be reckoned for another advantage, which history has, or must have, to be deemed authentic,

over tradition, by what passes every day under our eyes, when we see almost every public fact related, and even transmitted to posterity, not according to truth, but according to the wrong judgments which are made by prejudice or by passion. What happens now, happened formerly : and no stronger proof of it can be required than that which we find in ARRIAN. He had before him the memorials of ARISTOBULUS and of PTOLEMY, two principal captains that accompanied ALEXANDER in all his expeditions ; and yet the historian was puzzled, sometimes, by the inconsistency of their relations.

ON this head, the competency of original witnesses, it may be said, that if history wants it sometimes, tradition must want it always, and that tradition, especially, which I defend. I may be told, and I was told, that if every thing else, which I have advanced, was admitted, the objection, arising from the incompetency of witnesses, would be sufficient to refute me. It was urged, that whoever were the first to say there had been a monarchy of the Assyrians, might know the truth of what they said ; but that they, who were the first to affirm the beginning of the world, could not know the truth of what they said, not even on the supposition that they were the first of men. This tradition, therefore, is that of an opinion, not of a fact. The existence of God is a tradition too ; and theists, very often, appeal to the universality of this tradition to prove the

the truth of an opinion, just as you appeal to the same universality to prove a fact. Had you proved the fact, you might have drawn from it all the arguments that can be drawn to establish, in belief, the existence of a supreme Being. But you have amused yourself with nothing better than proving the truth of one opinion by the tradition of another; which is a proceeding that cannot be justified, because we are as able, and probably more able, judges of the opinion, than any of the antient nations could be witnesses of the fact. As different nations have their different follies, there are some common to all mankind. As there are fictions which favor the interests and promote the designs of those who govern in all the countries of the world, the existence of one supreme Being has been acknowledged in all ages, and, if you please to say so, by all people. Superstition took hold, and policy profited, of this opinion, under one form or other. Superstition abounds wherever there are men, and some kind of policy wherever there are societies. Metaphysical reasonings on the nature and attributes of a supreme Being may persuade philosophers that this Being, whom they assume to exist by the necessity of his nature, created the world, which does not seem so to exist. Naturalists, in particular, may have adopted easily an opinion which saves them much pains and useless research. A first cause of infinite wisdom and power cuts all the gordian knots that embarrass them, and a single

single supposition furnishes the solution of a thousand difficulties. All this was urged with much vehemence by DAMON, and he concluded by putting this dilemma. If the opinion of the commencement of the world is conformable to the knowledge we have of things, and proportioned to the human understanding, as you assert, there results from thence no proof that the fact is true, but great reason to believe that men might assume it, without knowing any thing of the matter. On the other side, if this be not true, your universal tradition wants the first and principal foundation of probability which you have laid down.

I HAVE put these objections, such as were made, and such as might have been made to me, in their full force. They seem plausible; let us see if they are unanswerable. They will not appear so, if I can shew first, that the atheist begs the question when he assumes that, supposing the world to have had a beginning, even the first of men could not be competent witnesses, because they could not be competent judges, of the truth of the fact: secondly, if I can state so clearly the distinction to be made between the tradition of an opinion, and the tradition of a fact, in our judgments about them, as to reduce to an absurdity the supposition, that the tradition we speak of is of the first sort: and, thirdly, if I can prove, by reasons drawn from the human nature and from

from general experience, that unless the world had really had a beginning, the opinion of it's eternity would have been the opinion of all antiquity, and the commencement of it would not have been established in tradition.

The atheist begs the question, and by begging it he advances a foolish and arrogant proposition : since to be sure that the first men could not be witnesses of the beginning of the world, he must assume that he knows, very exactly, how the world we inhabit was framed, if it was framed at all. Such inconveniencies happen frequently to those who combat truth. They call temerity to their aid ; and they affirm, boldly, on precarious conjectures, and when they have heated their own imagination, they hope, and not always in vain, to seduce those of other men. In the defence of the truth, we shall never be reduced to any such extremity. Tho the atheist must pretend to know how the material world was made, and in what manner the human race began, in order to deny that the first men were competent judges and witnesses of both ; we pretend to no such knowledge : but nothing less than such knowledge can justify his denial ; whereas the universality of the tradition justifies abundantly our affirmation. We may affirm, on the faith of all mankind, that the world began, much better than it can be affirmed, on the faith of a few precarious, partial, and inconsistent traditions, that there was an empire of the Assyrians.

To

To build a world is not so easy a thing as many a speculative architect has imagined. The author of the book of Genesis begins his history by it; and tho we do not set to his account the use which has been made of certain passages in his narration, yet is it impossible to excuse all the puerile, romantic, and absurd circumstances, which nothing could produce but the habit of dealing in trifling traditions, and a most profound ignorance. It is impossible to read what he writ on this subject, without feeling contempt for him as a philosopher, and horror as a divine; for he is to be considered under both these characters.

NATURAL philosophy made little progress among the Greeks and the Romans, and a system of the universe was very little known by them. The eastern nations knew it better; but among these we must not reckon that of the Jews. It has been said that PYTHAGORAS was a disciple of the prophet EZEKIEL, or had some other Jewish masters. If this idle conjecture were true in fact, it would not be true, however, that he took from them his mundane system. PHILOLAUS, who published his doctrines, had very different notions of it from those of the Jews, and from those of the other Greeks. One would think too, that some modern astronomer had dictated the hypothesis which PLUTARCH and DIOGENES LAERTIUS attribute to CLEANTHES, the Samian. This true system, which accords so little with that of
MOSES,

MOSES, after having been long lost, was renewed in the sixteenth century by COPERNICUS, confirmed and improved by GALILEI and KEPLER, and since demonstrated by NEWTON. How magnificent a scene of the universe have these new discoveries opened! how much more worthy of the wisdom, the power, and the immensity of God, than all the paultry confined systems of antient philosophers, and of MOSES among the rest!

THO we know much more than they did of the works of God, yet we know as little as they did concerning the production of them. Antiquity had other makers of worlds besides MOSES. PLATO was one of those: and if his hypothesis be no more probable than that of the jewish legislator, it is, at least, a little more reverential to the Supreme Being. The same presumptuous confidence has been seen in these ages, wherein philosophers, having greater knowledge, should have had more modesty, and have been more sensible how ignorant we remain, after all the improvements we are capable of making. DES CARTES, for instance, who had much of this presumption, and employed a great deal of artifice to make his hypothesis pass for real discoveries, acknowledged a little more need of a God than STRATO avowed. He wanted a God to create matter and to impress motion on it. But when he had assumed thus much, he thought himself able to proceed without this help, and to shew how the world was formed, or how an universe might be formed, by the laws of matter

ter and motion. I told DAMON, that I thought this philosopher's ill success would hinder him from any enterprize of the same kind; that I should, therefore, have still a right to conclude that he begged the question when he asserted that it implied contradiction to suppose the first men capable of knowing that the world began; and I desired him further to consider with me, whether, laying this presumption aside, we may not assume, without any, that there might have been certain marks, by which the first men must necessarily know that they were the first men, and that the system of the world began. If we find such marks, and find them probable, by their analogy to what we know, it will follow, I think, that the beginning of the world has some proof *a posteriori*; whereas the eternity of it can have none of this kind, any more than *a priori*.

HOWEVER this planet of ours was formed, the first men could not possibly be spectators of the formation of it. Both men and all other animals required an earth to walk on, food to nourish them, and an atmosphere to breathe in, and the light of the sun to conduct them. The prior existence of the sun might be necessary too on another account, antecedently to their creation. This great luminary might be necessary to the formation, as we know that it is to the preservation, of our planet; whether that of the moon were so or not, and whether the Arcadians were in the right or not, when they said that they were older than this secondary planet.

BUT now, tho there could be no human witnesses of the world arising out of a chaos, and growing into that form and order wherein we see it, yet the first men might know very certainly that this system of things began to exist. As it would be ridiculous to assert, like the thufcan author, whom SUIDAS mentions but does not name, that God employed twelve thousand years in creating the universe; so is there no necessity of believing that the solar system, or even this one planet, was the work of six days. Such precipitation seems not less repugnant to that general order of nature, which God established and which she observes in her productions, than the day of rest, which MOSES supposes God to have taken, or which the Jews invented to make one of their institutions more respectable, is repugnant to all the ideas we are able to frame of the Divinity. Tho it be conformable to our notions of wisdom, that every thing necessary to man was created, when he began to exist; yet is there nothing which obliges us to believe that mankind began to exist in all the parts of the world at once.

WE need put our imagination to no great efforts, to believe that all this might be: and if it might be, we may suppose that it was. We do not, like reasoners a priori, imagine what may have been according to our abstract reasonings, and so conclude from possibility to actuality. We proceed much more reasonably from actuality to possibility,
in

in a method so often, and so absurdly, reversed by philosophers. A more able naturalist would succeed better in finding those marks by which the first men might know the commencement of this system. I will mention three or four, which are obvious enough, and may serve to explain a matter that seemed paradoxical, and is not, perhaps, absolutely essential to my argument.

THE general opinion of all those who have reasoned about the creation or formation of the world, and that which MOSES himself follows, assumes that there was originally a chaos or confused mass of matter, wherein all the elements or first principles of things, which exist in the material system, were contained. Whether this mass was created or no, they thought it so necessary to be supposed, that they could not go on one step, in building a world, without it. As soon as it is supposed, “*instant ardentes Tyrii*,” they all go to work. Every one separates and disposes these materials in his own way; the laws of mechanism are employed, according to the different plans of these architects, and a world is soon made. In one of these philosophical romances, published at the end of the last century, the ingenious author assumes that our planet was, till the deluge, in a direct situation to the sun; that is to say, that its axis was parallel to the axis of the ecliptic, or, in other words, that the ecliptic was confounded with the equator. Among several advantages which he pretends to draw from this hypothesis, the

the great facility of peopling the world with inhabitants is one. He thinks that animals could not have been brought forth, nor have grown up, if there had been any variety in the seasons by the obliquity of the ecliptic, and if these children of the earth, hatched, as we may say, by the sun, had been exposed, at first, to the injuries of the air, and to the cold of a winter. Had this author been opposed by his own tribe alone, and in a theological way, he might have escaped pretty well; but the natural philosophers and the mathematicians rose up against him, and battered down his hypothesis. I enter not into particulars. The conclusion drawn from all their arguments was this, that the present situation being more advantageous to the earth, in general, than any other, we ought to be persuaded that it is now the same wherein God placed it originally. But I doubt very much whether this conclusion be undeniable. The Supreme Being proportions always his means to his ends, and may therefore employ different means when different ends are to be attained. Let it be that the present obliquity of the ecliptic, which is of twenty-three degrees and twenty-nine minutes, may be in the present state of the world the most advantageous. Nothing hinders us from assuming that another obliquity, or no obliquity at all, might be more advantageous when the present system of things began. If that of the chevalier DE LOUVILLE be true, this obliquity was of about forty-five degrees one hundred and thirty

thousand years ago. On the comparison of which two obliquities I shall leave philosophers and mathematicians to dispute as long as they please.

WHAT it is to my purpose to observe is, that no proof will arise, from all they can say, to convince us that the present was the original situation of the world to the sun. Infinite wisdom does not change the means, as divines would sometimes make us believe that he does at least in the economy of the moral system, when the ends are the same. Nay, the same means serve often to accomplish different ends. But when the ends are so different, that the means of accomplishing one imply contradiction with the means of accomplishing another, we may say, very assuredly, that infinite wisdom changes the means: and, therefore, if the means of preserving the material and animal world are different from those which were necessary to the beginning of both, the present position of the earth may very well be thought not to have been the first. If alternate corruptions and generations are become necessary, and if the former produce the latter, it could not be so from the first. The first was certainly very different from those which we observe. Corruption could not then be necessary to generation. If a greater degree of heat was so for some productions, that greater degree is to be found in BURNET's hypothesis. If less, and very different degrees were necessary, these different degrees are to be found in

in the same hypothesis, gradually lessening from the equator: and this gradation, by which different climates are formed, might be necessary for different productions to a certain distance from that climate where the sun was always in the zenith. As there were no variations in these different climates, but each enjoyed a particular and uniform season, the animals and plants of each were nourished and carried to the perfection of their growth, by the same principle by which they had been produced, and in a manner suitable to their nature, and to that of their climate.

WHILST it fared thus with one part of the world, the other parts were in a very different state, according to this hypothesis. But, far from finding any thing here, that may seem repugnant to the wisdom of the architect, this wisdom seems more fully displayed than in the hypothesis of MOSES or of PLATO, and this order to have much more analogy with the order of nature which we see established. These different climates appear like so many different matrices or wombs, impregnated with the original seeds of things, and wherein the first productions were formed by the inconceivable energy of divine power. In other climates, more distant from the equator, where the influence of the sun, the first of second causes employed in these generations, was gradually less felt, the great work of the creation might advance more slowly. In climates still more distant, this influence might become too weak to produce any considerable effects,

fects, and the great work might proceed still more slowly, or not at all. Then, perhaps, the obliquity of the ecliptic might begin, by slow degrees, without causing any disorder in the climates already inhabited. The first situation of the world to the sun having had it's effect, another situation might become necessary for two purposes, to render those climates, where the sun was always in the zenith, more temperate; to carry the generations of animals and of the fruits of the earth forward on both sides to the north and to the south; to give a greater degree of heat where a greater was still wanted, and to give some where there was none at all.

WE may believe that this obliquity of the ecliptic arose much faster, than the chevalier DE LOUVILLE assumed it to decrease. A minute in one hundred years is too little. Let us suppose, on the prerogative of hypotheses, a degree, and even more, if you think fit. In this manner, those parts of the world, which were excessively heated, cooled; and those which were frozen by cold, heated gradually. Thus a system of final causes became, it may be, complete; and the earth, having passed through the positions which were of all possible positions the most proper to create, might stop at that which is said to be of all others the most proper to preserve.

If the learned master of the charter-house, and the able scotch mathematician, who writ against him,

him, were still alive, I should expect that they would think themselves under some obligation to me for having endeavoured to compromise matters between them, and to unite, in one scheme, their contrary opinions. But since I cannot have this advantage, I must content myself with the inward satisfaction I feel in contemplating this plausible notion, which I have advanced on grounds as good as many of those, that are not deemed paradoxical either by divines or philosophers, have been established. They are possible, no doubt; and, I presume, they will never be demonstrated false, nor any other ways of accounting for the same things, true. It is not however quite necessary to my purpose; for whatever circle our planet described when her course round the sun began, we must be persuaded that the surface of it was warmed and cherished enough by the rays of the central sun to promote generation and vegetation, for which it was already prepared. If the present obliquity of the ecliptic prevailed then, the torrid, the temperate, and the frozen zones, as we call them, might be capable of the various productions proper to them; or we may assume, very consistently, that countries more distant received, from those that were nearer the sun, such animals and such plants as their climates were fit to preserve, tho not fit to generate. In short, we need not apprehend the want of heat, even on the received hypothesis. The sun, much older probably than our world, and who has, certainly, grown older ever since,

may have lost much of the force and efficacy which he had in those primeval days. Nay more; astronomers and natural philosophers agree, I think, about that perpetual expence which all the suns of the universe are at, to enlighten, to warm, and nourish their several systems; of which expence we must believe that our sun has his share. They assume indeed that the atmospheres of these suns compress so strongly the exhalations that rise from them, and drive them back with so much force and so much economy, not suffering any more than are absolutely necessary to pass, that these springs of light and heat cannot be exhausted, nor suffer any great diminution, in thousands of years. But thousands of years, and God alone knows how many, are elapsed since our sun was first lighted up, and he may have therefore suffered some diminution.

THESE hypothetical reasonings, and others to the same purpose, may be, I think, maintained, whether we suppose this obliquity of the ecliptic to have been decreasing or increasing: for the decrease of some minutes in a century, during a space of time even as long as that which the Egyptians imagined, will not be found inconsistent with our hypothesis. Our hypothesis wants to assume little more than this, that nature, who acts with much simplicity and uniformity, acted much in the same manner after her first productions, in those of animals for instance: and if this be granted, it will follow, evidently, that
the

the first men were competent witnesses of the first propagations of the animal kind; which would be of itself a sufficient proof that they were such of the beginning of the world.

NATURE has every where fixed certain seasons, at which all, or the greatest part, of them propagate their several species, whilst man enjoys the noble prerogative of doing the same all the year round. “*Homini maxime coitus temporibus*” “*omnibus opportunus est.*” It is ARISTOTLE who says this. But then this prerogative extends no further: and a term is fixed to man, as it is to the species of all other animals for the bearing their fruit. The philosopher I have cited descends into a particular account of these different terms, in the fifth book of his History of animals: and as we know that men are nine months in their mothers bellies, he assures that the camel is twelve. These animals then, and all those who require a longer term than that of nine months, appeared later even than the second generation of human creatures in the ordinary manner that it has been carried on from the first generation downwards. Men were by consequence witnesses of the first propagations of animals. The same proposition will hold, if we suppose them generated faster and sooner in the course of these generations, or even primevally: for, if man, for example, was but three days, or three hours, in forming out of the earth, and in receiving the breath of life, it will follow, by a very fair analogy, that

the same operations took up four days or four hours for the formation of a camel, and eight for that of an elephant.

I MIGHT expect to hear, upon this occasion, many common-place notions advanced, to shew more time required, in the process of nature, to form this animal after the image of God, than all the others, so vastly inferior to him in figure and composition. But these persons ought to reflect, that how distant soever animal may be from animal, relatively to our notions of perfection and imperfection, there can be no difference in the distance between any of them and God, who ordered this process of nature for reasons that we do not know, but certainly without regard to that dignity of nature which we imagine. The creation of a man or of an angel, in the works of God, is not more considerable than the creation of the meanest insect, nor requires that the divine energy should be exerted in a longer and more operose process of nature.

BUT if it is probable that the first men might see the commencement of those species of animals, whose formation required longer time than their own, it is not impossible, neither, that they might see the commencement of those species, whose formation required a less time. We may very easily imagine that the creation had two sorts of progression, as the world has two sorts of motion. Nature might follow such an order, as we
have

have mentioned, in every climate ; but she might follow a certain general order, likewise, in all climates alike. As more time was necessary for the production of one animal than another, in the same climate ; so more time might be necessary to bring the same animal up to the perfection of his nature in one climate than in another. As the hare might begin to run and the sheep to feed before either man, or camel, or elephant, was sufficiently formed to answer the ends of his creation ; so the creation, in general, might be far advanced, or even completed, in some climates, before it was so in others. The seeds, or first principles, of animal life might have more or less force and vigor, according to the different influences of the sun, tho they were scattered every where alike. The first men, therefore, who might see no more than the last acts, if I may say so, of this great drama in the countries where they themselves arose, might see the very first acts wherein animals were brought on the stage, in other countries. They might be spectators at twice, and in a reversed order, of the whole piece.

CREATION finished, propagation began, and the same instinct urged the two sexes to the same act. Instinct urged them to it first ; a sense of pleasure recalled them to it afterwards : and the multiplication of their species was not a motive, probably, to these conjunctions. The revolution of some months shewed them the consequences of it ; and the revolution of some years shewed them

them that they and their offspring were born to die. Let us put ourselves, for a moment, in the place of the first men. Could they doubt that they were such? Could they doubt that all the other animals they saw, were the first of their kinds likewise? Could they fail to transmit to their posterity this tradition, “the world had a beginning?” He, who has a great mind to cavil, may say that they did not know, by these marks, that the material world began; they only knew that the animal inhabitants of it began then to exist. But if the first men could not be witnesses of their own creation, they might be such of the creation of other animals, as much as of the propagation of their own, and of every other species: so that, if they knew certainly that the animal world began, I do not see what the atheist will gain by assuming that they were ignorant of the beginning of the material world. A God was necessary for one as much as for the other: and if tradition affirmed nothing more than the first, it would serve equally well to refute the atheist, who denies the existence of any such Being. Was it necessary to discover this great truth that they should reason logically, and transmit to posterity an opinion only? But in all cases they might know by other marks, sufficient to awaken the attention of a Samojede or to inform an Hot-tentot, that the whole system then began. The lives of these men were, probably, much longer than ours; and if you compare what they must have seen in their youth, with what they must have

have observed in their old age, you will find that the experience of their whole lives was one continued proof to them, that they lived in the first age of the material world. Observe it in one instance. The earth, out of which they had been created, furnished what was necessary for their subsistence.

per se dabat omnia tellus ;

Contentique cibus nullo cogente creatis,

Arbuteos foetus, montanaque fragra, legebant, &c.

These were the spontaneous gifts of nature ; and men had no share, at first, in the production or improvement of them. They learned in time to do both, to sow corn, and to make bread. Trees grew up ; and as they grew, they furnished a better retreat to birds, and a better shade to men. An old oak became at length, to them, a new phaenomenon.

If it was not time to finish this article, I might easily shew, in a multitude of other instances, that the first men must necessarily know that they were contemporaries with the material world, and saw the beginning of a new order of things. But after wandering, in complaisance to the atheist, in the spaces of imagination, and to shew him that altho neither the first nor the last of men were able to discover how the world was made, yet the first might know by sufficient experience, and the last by sufficient testimony, that it had a
beginning ;

beginning; let us return into the closer precincts of reason, and finish this article, as Mr. HUYGENS finishes his conjectures about the planetary world. After speaking of the absurdities contained in the physics of DES CARTES, he adds, “ mihi magnum quid consecuti videbimur si, quemadmodum sese habeant res, quae in natura existunt, intellexerimus, a quo longissime etiam nunc absumus. Quomodo autem quaeque effectae fuerint, quodque sint esse coeperint, id nequaquam humano ingenio excogitari, aut conjecturis attingi, posse,” this philosopher asserts with great reason. Experimental philosophy has made great progress already, in discovering to us the things and the order of nature. Where it continues to be cultivated it will continue, doubtless, to discover more: and after all, human knowledge will stop far short of human curiosity; for this goes beyond our means of knowledge, nay, even beyond the boldest conjectures we can make.

BUT now, having shewn the atheist, ex abundantia, how the first men might have certainty of knowledge concerning the beginning of the world, and were therefore authentic witnesses of the truth of this fact, and authentic authors of the tradition, it is time to shew that, without entering into such considerations, we must allow this tradition to be a tradition of fact, and not of opinion. This is the second of those articles that we proposed to examine in answer to the atheist's objections.

objections. There must be some certain principles and some certain rule to distinguish between these two sorts of tradition, as the atheist seems to allow, when he distinguishes one from the other. Now these principles are not, I think, hard to find; and the rule that results from them is simple and plain.

COMMON sense requires that every thing proposed to the understanding should be accompanied with such proofs as the nature of it can furnish. He who requires more, is guilty of absurdity. He who requires less, of rashness. As the nature of the proposition decides what proofs are exigible and what not, so the kind of proof determines the class into which the proposition is to be ranged. He, for instance, who affirms that there is a God, advances a proposition which is an object of demonstrative knowledge alone, and a demonstration is required from him. If he makes the demonstration, we are obliged to own that we know there is a God, and the proposition becomes a judgment of nature, not merely an opinion, according to the distinction made somewhere in TULLY; tho demonstrations are sometimes called opinions, as opinions are often called demonstrations. If, by his fault or by ours, we have not a clear perception of the ideas or of the connection of them which form this demonstration, or if, without troubling ourselves to follow it, we receive the proposition for true on the authority of others, it is, indeed, opinion,

opinion, not knowledge in us. But whether we receive it, or whether we reject it, we can neither require nor employ, with propriety, any other proofs than those which are conformable to the nature of the proposition. Tradition is not one of them. It may prove that men have generally believed a God, but it cannot prove that such a Being exists. Nothing can be more trifling, therefore, than to insist, as theists are apt to do, on this proof, as if the opinion proved the fact; as if all men had been alike capable of the demonstration; or, as if the demonstration was not necessary to establish the truth of the opinion. Demonstration, indeed, is not necessary on the hypothesis, that all men have an innate idea of God. But this hypothesis has been, I think, long exploded. I do not remember, at least, to have heard it maintained by more than one archbishop, two or three ignorant monks, and as many devout ladies.

As much as I am convinced of the existence of a supreme all-perfect Being, as seriously as I adore his majesty, bless his goodness, and resign myself chearfully to his providence, I should be sorry to rest my conviction on the authority of any man, or of all mankind: since authority cannot be, and demonstration is, the sole proper proof in this case. Should I quote to the atheist, a SUPHIS, an AMENOPHIS, an ORUS, or any of those pretended contemplators of divinity, he would laugh at me with reason; tho he might allow,

low, at the same time, that these seers, who acknowledged inferior beings, beings little raised above humanity, were infinitely less absurd than those who had the front to assert that they saw the invisible God, and conversed familiarly with him. The demonstration of his existence arises from sensitive knowledge; since it is a posteriori only that we can prove the first cause to be an intelligent cause: but he is not for that an object of sensitive knowledge. This proposition, therefore, "there is a God," which becomes a judgment of nature, an object of demonstrative knowledge to every one who can make the demonstration, or understand it when it is made, comes down as an opinion only in tradition, and can pass for nothing better on that authority.

Is this now the case of that proposition which affirms the beginning of the world? Reason alone can authorise the first, and when I subscribe to the truth of it, I do this without any regard to tradition. All that tradition tells me is, that men made the same judgment four or five thousand years ago. If it told me that they made a contrary judgment, and believed the world eternal, I should make still the same on a subject concerning which we of this age are as competent judges, as the men who lived at any time before us. This proposition, "the world had a beginning," affirms a fact long ago past, and which can, therefore, be received for true on no other authority than that of men who lived long ago, and

and at, or near the time when this event happened. I consult my reason, indeed, to examine whether the fact implies contradiction; no more: and when I find that it does not, I receive it for true, on the faith of human testimony, which is the proper proof to me of every fact whereof I have not been myself a witness, and without any regard to the supposed conformity of it to the general ideas of mankind. This supposed conformity, if it be real, will add nothing to the probability of the fact, as a nonconformity will take none away. Nothing, therefore, can be more trifling than the cavil made by the atheist, when he objects that the more probable this tradition is, the more reason we have to take it for an universal tradition of opinion, not of fact. The cavil is not only trifling, but to the last degree absurd; for on this principle it will follow that the more probable a fact is, the less reason we have to receive it, as a true fact, on historical or traditional authority. I consult my reason and my experience to discover whether the fact, I am told, may have happened possibly, and then I consult history and tradition to discover whether it has happened actually. But, according to DAMON's logic, the more my reason and my experience shew me the first, the more reason I have to believe that history and tradition record, in every such case, an antient opinion, not an antient fact.

BUT it is time that I should hasten to a conclusion, by shewing, in the last place, that if the world

world had not really had a beginning, the opinion of it's eternity would have been the general opinion of antiquity; and the commencement of it would not have been transmitted by tradition, either as a fact, or, perhaps, as an opinion. Tho men might, in all ages, demonstrate the existence of God, they could not demonstrate alike, in any age, the commencement of the world: and, accordingly, we see that some philosophers, who believed there was a first principle, a first intelligent cause, a Supreme Being, held, at the same time, that the world was eternal; far from being induced by their theism to believe it had a commencement. Others were, I doubt not, confirmed in the opinion that there was a God, or even led to believe it, and to seek the demonstration of it, by the proofs they had of this fact, the world had a beginning in time. It is much more probable that the received fact gave occasion to, or fortified, the opinion, than that the opinion determined them to assume the fact.

THE atheist, who looks on both to be nothing more than traditional opinions, will be very indifferent which of them passes for the first. He blends them together; and attributes that of God's existence to the superstition of mankind, and to the policy of legislators. It might seem hard to attribute that of the beginning of the world to the same principles, since it seems to have little or no relation to them. He contents himself therefore, at least DAMON did so with me, to insist that philosophers might easily fall into an

opinion, which saved them much trouble in accounting for the original of things, by the supposition of an eternal Being, infinitely wise and powerful. But the atheist would do well to consider, that this seeming solution of a difficulty implies a very real absurdity, for it implies that there were philosophers as soon as there were men. He would do well to consider, further, that when there were philosophers, those, who admitted the existence of such a Being, were not the less curious in their researches of the mechanical causes of all the phaenomena. In short, he would do well to consider that these philosophers would have cut the gordian knots of all their difficulties by assuming the eternity of the world much more easily, than they could untie them by assuming that a Being infinitely wise and powerful had made it. They might have said, in this case, once for all, things have been eternally as they are: to what purpose should we seek the original and essential causes of that which never began?

BUT further, if we pass over the absurdity of supposing that there were philosophers as soon as there were men, or the improbability of this supposition, that the commencement of the world was not believed till philosophers taught it; I would still ask, and the atheist would be puzzled to tell me, how the belief of the commencement of the world could be established, not only where philosophy and science flourished; but even universally, among nations who had no communica-
tion

tion with these, and who were, themselves, the least civilised and the most ignorant? If it be said that, uncivilised and ignorant as they were, this opinion might arise and spread among them, because it was agreeable to their general notions, and analogous to what daily experience shewed them, in innumerable instances, as well as to what they themselves were able to do; I must assert, on the contrary, this opinion was repugnant to the natural character of the human mind, to what we may feel in ourselves, and observe in all other men. All men are, in one respect, disciples of PROTAGORAS. Uninstructed nature teaches them, like him, that man is the measure of all things; that our sensations communicate certain knowledge; that every thing is what it appears to us to be; and that the things which do not appear to us, are not. He who sees no inequality between two objects, affirms that they are equal: and we judge naturally of the reality of all objects by the perceptions we have of them. Antient astronomers believed the stars to be immoveably fixed in a solid firmament, and never suspected them to incline to the pole, or to decline from it. The sea was thought to have no bounds, because the bounds of it were unknown; and the celestial bodies to be incorruptible, because no changes were discerned in them. Philosophers reason often, and the vulgar always, like the roses in FONTENELLE. A comparison taken from those insects who live one day only, would have been more to his purpose; but roses were more

worthy than insects to be offered to the marchioness, and such a philosopher as FONTENELLE might dispense with some want of precision in favor of his gallantry. Such, as I have described it, is the natural character of the human mind. It infects all our judgments, moral as well as physical, till we learn to correct it by experience and a long course of reflection. This the uncivilised ignorant people we speak of, could not do; and it was, therefore, agreeable to the general disposition of their minds, to believe that things had been always such as they saw them to be.

THIS must have been universally the case, I think, in countries where the natural, unimproved character of the human mind prevailed alone. In those which philosophy began to enlighten, some might doubt of this eternity; but some other philosophers, and the people in general, would continue to believe it. From whence can we imagine that they should derive a contrary opinion? Their experience shewed them, indeed, generation and corruption; that particular things began, and then ceased to be; but they saw, on the whole, an uniform series of the same revolutions of things; their ideas were conformable to the experience which framed them, and the eternity of the world was conformable to these ideas. Such considerations may serve to shew what I have advanced, that the eternity of the world might have been the universal tradition, but that the commencement of it could not have been

been so, if it had not commenced, and men had not known that it had. On this hypothesis, all the consequences of it follow naturally. One consequence is, that, since the world and mankind began in time, the tradition of this beginning should be a little more or a little less obscurely, but universally, known: and this consequence has followed. Another consequence is, that men, who believed the world to have been created, in the strict sense of the word, or that the confused matter of a chaos was reduced into a mundane system, must have believed that this stupendous system was produced by some principle unknown to them, and superior to itself; for they could not fail to perceive, on the first notices of sense, and the first essays of reason, that the idea of an effect included necessarily in it the idea of a cause: this consequence followed likewise. Once more, altho the first men could doubt no more that some cause of the world, than that the world itself, existed, yet another consequence of this great event, and of the surprise, inexperience, and ignorance of mankind, must have been much doubt and uncertainty concerning the first cause: and this likewise followed. CUDWORTH has endeavoured to prove, many have thought, and I incline to think, that the unity of a first intelligent cause was the original belief of mankind. But if it was so, a belief soon succeeded that gods, coadjutors to the first in making and governing the world, as well as inferior gods and men, and the whole material world, proceeded from this

eternal source of all existence. I need not enumerate any of those various hypotheses that arose from such absurd notions. Many of them have continued to this day, and are held even by christians, whom revelation as well as reason enlightens. The tradition of the fact, that the world began, and that of the opinion, that God is, have come down to us, tho not entirely without opposition, from the most early ages. But the manner of God's being, and of his working in the creation, and government of the world, have been matters of dispute in all ages, ever since presumptuous mortals affected to descend into particulars, to know any thing at all of one, or any thing more of the other, than that he is self-existent and all-perfect, and that his will, relatively to his human creatures, is revealed to them in the constitution of their system.

To conclude. I am far from resting the proof of God's existence on the authority of this tradition, that the world began. I know that we are able to demonstrate this fundamental truth of all religion, whether it began or no. But since we cannot reject this tradition without renouncing almost all we know; and since it leads men to acknowledge a Supreme Being, by a proof levelled to the meanest understanding, I think we ought to insist upon it. I am the more confirmed in thinking so by the effect it had in the dispute of which I have given you some account. DAMON was embarrassed by it so much, that he had recourse

course at last to the wild hypothesis of DEMOCRITUS and EPICURUS, if we really know what that of the former was. This hypothesis is an abyss of absurdity. In that I left him, pitying from the bottom of my heart, for I love the man, his blindness and his obstinacy; the blindness of one who sees so clearly, and the obstinacy of one who shews so much candor on other occasions.

counts as but to the wild hypothesis of Descartes
 and Epicurus, if we really know what that
 of the former was. This hypothesis is an abridgment
 of absurdity. I have felt him, playing down
 the bottom of my heart, for I love the man, his
 standards and his obliquity, the blindness of one
 who is so clearly, and the obliquity of one who
 shows so much candor on other occasions.

IN ALL

and of the other, but to the point of the
 and need to be a more complete and
 of the other, but to the point of the
 of the other, but to the point of the
 of the other, but to the point of the
 of the other, but to the point of the

Archbishop

and of the other, but to the point of the

WORKS

one of the most, and I have felt him, playing down
 the bottom of my heart, for I love the man, his
 standards and his obliquity, the blindness of one
 who is so clearly, and the obliquity of one who
 shows so much candor on other occasions.

A

L E T T E R

Occasioned by one of

Archbishop TILLOTSON'S

S E R M O N S.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R

S E R M O N

I now Archbishopp of York
usual Tacton's sermon, the doctrine you
mentioned on a few occasions; and the chief of it
has been in common use in this country, that the
there is a much more intimate union to the
spirit, than the divine. The former when all the
real advantages against a common adversary, which
the latter has in his power to take; but he gives
none against himself, as the latter is forced to do.
When the divine writes or speaks on any subject
relative to his protection, he is always supported
by his theological system; whether his mind be
for, or not, his tongue and his pen cannot be other-
wise. A thief is under no constraint of this kind.
He may speak the truth, such as it appears to him;
when the divine, who is appears the same to him,
must

LETTER

Occasioned by one of

Archbishop TILLOTSON'S

SERMONS.

I COME from reading, in BARBEYRAC'S translation of TILLOTSON'S sermons, the discourse you mentioned on a late occasion: and the effect of it has been to confirm me in this opinion, that the theist is a much more formidable enemy to the atheist, than the divine. The former takes all the real advantages against a common adversary, which the latter has it in his power to take; but he gives none against himself, as the latter is forced to do. When the divine writes or disputes on any subject, relative to his profession, he is always embarrassed by his theological system: whether his mind be so, or not, his tongue and his pen cannot be otherwise. A theist is under no constraint of this kind. He may speak the truth, such as it appears to him, when the divine, tho it appears the same to him, must

must be silent. The theist may be silent, by regards of prudence, when the divine is obliged to speak by the obligation of his profession, and to maintain what he cannot defend, as well as what he can: and thus, if he imposes on some, he exposes himself to the attacks of others. When the theist has demonstrated the existence of a supreme, all-perfect Being, and the moral obligations of his rational creatures, he stops where the means of human knowledge stop, and makes no vain and presumptuous efforts to go beyond them, by the help of reason or revelation. Just so, when he has proved that the world had a beginning, on foundations of the highest probability tradition can give, he stops short likewise; because, in the nature of things, we can have no other proof of the fact. Not so the divine. His system drags him on. He attempts, most absurdly, to support, in the first case, a demonstrated truth by false arguments; and, in the second, to make tradition vouch for more than any receivable tradition does or can vouch. The archbishop himself seems sensible of this in one place: for having asserted the universal assent of mankind to this great truth, that there is a God, and having ascribed the universality of this assent to the nature of the human mind, on which God has impressed an innate idea of himself, he tries to evade the absurdity by adding, “or which (that is the human mind) is so disposed, that men may discover, by the due use of it’s faculties, the existence of God.” He endeavours to evade the theological absurdity, which he could not maintain; but he endeavours

it in vain: for it is evidently false that the two propositions are in any sort the same. The difference between affirming, that the mind of man is able, by a due use of it's faculties, to discover the existence of God, and that the mind of man has an innate idea of this existence, which prevents and excludes the use of any mental faculties, except that of bare perception, is too obvious to be insisted upon.

DIVINES reason, sometimes, on this subject with more precaution. They slide over the doctrine of innate ideas, without maintaining, or renouncing it directly; and think it sufficient to say, that the belief of a God is founded on a certain natural proportion, which there is between this great truth and the conceptions of the human mind. I inclined, as you know, to think in the same manner, and to believe that the first men, at least, who knew that they were such, and who saw the material world begin, would be led, by the natural conceptions of their minds to acknowledge a first Cause of infinite wisdom and power, and far above all these conceptions. Thus it seemed to me, that the tradition of a fact, and of an opinion grounded on it, which are apt to be confounded, tho they should be always distinguished, might come down together. But I confess myself obliged, on further reflection, to abandon this hypothesis. I abandon it with the less regret, because, whatever the first men might think, nay, whether the world had a beginning in time (as I am firmly persuaded it had) or not, the demonstration of God's existence will remain

remain unshaken. But I am obliged to abandon it, because a natural and intimate proportion between the existence of God, and the universal conceptions of the human mind, may appear chimerical ; and perhaps is so. It is, I doubt, chimerical, even when it is applied to the first men. The variety of the phaenomena, which struck their senses, would lead the generality, most probably, to imagine a variety of causes : and more observations and deeper reflections, than the first men could make, were necessary to prove the unity of the first cause. That some made them, at least very early, can scarce be doubted. So that the orthodox belief and polytheism might grow up together, tho the latter might spread wider and faster than the former.

If there was really such a proportion, or such a conformity, as is assumed, particular men, philosophers here and there, might have held polytheism notwithstanding this ; but the general opinion of mankind would have been the orthodox opinion : instead of which we know that polytheism and idolatry prevailed almost every where. Polytheism and idolatry, therefore, seem more conformable to human ideas, abstracted from the first appearances of things, and better proportioned, by an analogy of human conceptions, to the uncultivated reason of mankind, and to understandings not sufficiently informed. Our archbishop supposes it objected to him, that the general consent of mankind in acknowledging one God, does not prove that there is one, any more than the general consent of numberless

berless nations in acknowledging several, proves that there are several. He answers the objection by saying, that philosophers and wise men, in every nation and in every age, were of a different opinion from the vulgar; so that the heterodox opinion cannot pretend to have general consent on it's side, since the opinions of the vulgar, opposed to those of philosophers and wise men, can be received into this reckoning no otherwise, than like a multitude of noughts without any figure. This is strange reasoning to fall from the pen of so great a man. It is certain that the orthodox belief maintained itself in some minds, perhaps in some nations, and pierced through all the darkness of ignorant ages: but yet polytheism, and the consequence of it, idolatry, were avowed and taught by legislators and by philosophers. Neither will it avail any thing to say, that these men had their inward, as well as their outward, doctrine; and that they taught, in private, the contrary of what they taught in public. On this very supposition it will still follow that polytheism and idolatry prevailed more easily, because they were more conformable to the natural conceptions of the human mind, than the belief of one first intelligent cause, the sole creator, preserver, and governor of all things. It is absurd to say, that the consent of some wise men, and even of some nations, instructed and governed by them, in the acknowledgment of one Supreme Being, is a proof that this idea is innate in all men, or universally proportioned to the conceptions of all men; and to deny that the almost
universal

universal consent of mankind, in the acknowledgment of several gods, is a proof of the contrary.

If you are not very well satisfied with these theological reasonings, as I think you are not, you will be no better satisfied with the manner in which our archbishop attempts to prove that the world had a beginning. The question, which is commonly put to those who maintain the eternity of it would be trifling, as well as trite, if it did not oblige the atheist to give an answer which implies, in his mouth, the greatest absurdity, and makes him pronounce in effect his own condemnation. TILLOTSON takes this advantage, as I have done: but he throws it away, when he has taken it, by applying it against those who may think the world more antient than the theological aera makes it to be, tho they do not believe it eternal. He asserts that the most antient histories were writ long after this aera; and quotes, to prove it, some verses of LUCRETIVS, finely writ, but very little to the purpose, because of no authority in this case.

“ Si nulla fuit genitalis origo
 “ Terrarum et coeli, semperque eterna fuere;
 “ Cur supra bellum Thebanum, et funera Trojae,
 “ Non alias alii quoque res cecinere poëtae?”

MEN have been always fond, not only to carry the originals of their several nations as far back as they could, and to represent them, sometimes, as coeval with the world itself, but to establish their own or the traditions which had come to them,

as

as the most antient of all traditions. Thus the roman poet employed those of Greece to prove that the world had not begun very long before the wars of Thebes and of Troy. The world had a beginning, says the Jew ; for there is neither history nor tradition more antient than MOSES ; and we know by his writings how, and how long ago, the world was created. If we bring a Chinese into the scene, he will assure us that the world had a beginning, because the cycles, of threescore years each, in the chronological tables of his nation, do not rise any higher than HOAM-TI, who reigned about four thousand four hundred years before our aera ; that from him to XIN-NUM, the successor of FOHI, there are not more than three hundred and eighty years ; and that FOHI was the first that civilised mankind. It was he, will the Chinese continue to say, who left us the adorable, and hitherto incomprehensible, Yekim, in the explication of which our learned men have labored these two thousand six hundred years. It was FOHI and XIN-NUM who taught men the use of the plough, who invented letters, and to whom all arts and sciences owe their original. Let a learned Mexican come forward next, and he will assure you, not only, that the world began, but that the time when it began is known ; for we had but nine kings before MONTEZUMA, will this great chronologer say. TENUCH was the first of them, and the founder of our monarchy ; our hieroglyphical annals rise no higher ; we know nothing beyond him ; this calculation is confirmed by that of our

neighbours, whose traditions place the destruction of the last sun, and the beginning of this, but a little before our aera. Let a Peruvian follow the Mexican, he will assure us that the inca MANCO-CAPAC preceded ATAHUALPA about four hundred years; that he and his sister, COYA-MA-MA-OELLO-HUACO, were sent, at that time, by their father, the sun, to civilise mankind, who could not have been long in being, since they had neither civil polity nor religion, since they knew neither how to build houses, to spin wool or cotton to cover their nakedness, nor to till their lands. These are the traditions of the east and of the west. The former make the world more antient than those of the Jews, as they stand in the Hebrew, at least; the latter place the commencement of it about the beginning of the twelfth century of the christian aera, that is about the time of your king Louis le gros, and of our first norman princes. Our learned Europeans may laugh as much as they please at these learned Americans: but they must not be offended, if they are laughed at, in their turn, by those who think that, if CADMUS, the cook of a certain king of Sidon, carried the use of letters, and his son, or his grandson, BACCHUS, the culture of the vine, to the Greeks three thousand years before MANCO CAPAC civilised the Peruvians, it may very well be that the atlantic, or some other nation still more unknown to us, had made all these improvements, by a long experience, three thousand years before the Greeks, or even their masters, who boasted of a much greater antiquity, the Egyptians.

A CROWD of reflections presents itself: but these may serve to shew how ridiculous it is, whilst we receive on the faith of universal tradition this fact, "the world had a beginning," to go about to fix the aera of it according to those of any particular nations. The negative argument, "we have no memorials beyond such a time," proves nothing but our ignorance; and the positive argument, that "we have relations of the beginning of arts and sciences in several countries," proves nothing more than what it is very needless to prove; I mean, that there was a time, when every one of these nations began to be civilised. Neither of these arguments is of weight against the atheist who asserts the eternity of the world. But they give him an advantage, such as it is, which bad arguments give frequently in polemical writings; and having refuted these, he may triumph, as if he had refuted all the rest: which is a practice very common among his adversaries the divines.

If the divine had not more at heart to establish the credit of jewish traditions, than the commencement of the world, he would not proceed as he does. He would not neglect the universal tradition of a naked fact, such as tradition may preserve, to insist on particular traditions of a fact so complicated with circumstances that no tradition could preserve it. These circumstances might make the fact doubtful; the fact will never make them probable. Even that of the time, when the present

system of things began, has been supported weakly, I will not, tho I think I might, say fraudulently, by jewish rabbins and by christian doctors, from JULIUS AFRICANUS, and EUSEBIUS, and GEORGE the monk, down to STILLINGFLEET, whom I mention, particularly, because TILLOTSON ventures to assert, that he has proved, in his *Origines sacrae*, the chronological traditions of the Egyptians, and the Chaldeans, to agree with those of the Bible. If he had proved this, which he has not most certainly, he would have proved nothing more than what the Mexicans assert, that the traditions of two or three neighbouring nations, all derived probably enough from one original, are conformable to one another. But it is, indeed, too bold an imposition to pretend to prove, by descending into particulars of facts and dates, any thing of this kind. Our learned antiquaries have no other materials than a certain number of broken, incoherent, and precarious traditions. These they make to cohere, for the most part, by guess; and then drag them to a seeming conformity with the mosaical system, which they assume all along to be true, whilst they pretend to prove it to be so by collateral evidence. I will only add, to shew how impertinent all this admired learning ought to be deemed, that, by little differences in the arrangement of the same materials, and by a no greater liberty of guessing, distinct, opposite, and yet equal probabilities may be made to result from them. I affirm this the more confidently, because I tried it once, as you may remember, and we both thought that the trial succeeded very plausibly.

BUT, without insisting any longer on this head, to shew how divines weaken the short and plain proof that we have of the beginning of the world, let us grant, for argument's sake, that the most antient traditions are the mosaical, and that arts and sciences have not been invented more than four or five thousand years, or more or less, as they think fit. Will they prove, even by this concession, that the world has had a beginning? They cannot: for the atheist will object that he may have reason to think the world eternal, without being obliged to think the arts and sciences eternal likewise. He will maintain it to be indifferent, in his hypothesis, when or where they began; since, at whatever aera the divine places this beginning, an eternity must have preceded this aera. The divine, therefore, will be obliged to shew that it implies contradiction to assert that the world is from eternity, and not to assert that arts and sciences are so likewise. He will endeavour this by assuming, as TILLOTSON does, that arts and sciences are necessary to the well-being of mankind, and even to their being; that necessity, the great mother of industry and of invention, set mankind to work as soon, and as fast, as the species began, and multiplied; in some places with more, in others with less, of these, but in all with as much as their real wants required. Since you agree then, will the divine say to the atheist, that arts and sciences began about the time we have fixed, the world must have begun about the time we have fixed likewise. This

reasoning is commonly employed against those atheists who assume that the world is eternal. But, without being one of their number, I venture to say that this reasoning is frivolous, and founded on a supposition, which the men who make it must know to be false. The different acras of arts and sciences, invented in some countries, and carried into others, are so distant, even according to the received chronology, that the men who dispensed with the want of them, during such long intervals, might have dispensed with it longer, and, in many cases, always. Are there not nations, at this hour, whose originals are unknown to us, who may be the Aborigines of the countries they inhabit, and who are ignorant not only of all science, but of many arts supposed necessary ; not only of letters, for instance, but of those which serve to defend us against the inclemency of the air and the rigor of the seasons, by making cloaths and building houses sufficient for this purpose ? These arts must have their place, surely, among those which TILLOTSON reckons so necessary, or at least so useful, to mankind, that they could not fail to be invented, nor, when they were invented, to be preserved. But his reasoning will not hold here neither ; for, if these arts were ever known to the people, to whom they are now unknown, they may be totally lost, after having been once found : nay, they may have been found, lost, and found anew, an infinite number of times, in an eternal duration. If these arts were never known to the people to whom they are now unknown, it follows

follows that mankind may dispense with the want of them during many ages, and, therefore, always. We may easily conceive that Samojedes, Hottentots, and other nations as barbarous and ignorant as these, have always been, and will always remain, in the same state of barbarity and ignorance.

TILLOTSON was led by his prejudices, and by the examples of men much inferior to him, in the herd of divines, into the two absurdities I have observed to you already; into that of proving the commencement of the world by the authority of particular traditions, which, considered separately, amount to no proof at all, instead of resting his proofs solely on the authority of universal tradition; and into that of confounding traditions of opinion with traditions of fact. He insists not only on traditions which concur in affirming that the world began, but on those which enter into a detail of circumstances concerning the manner in which it began. Nay more; he joins the existence of God and the commencement of the world together, as if tradition was proper alike to prove both these truths. His proceeding is much the same with that of MAXIMUS of Tyre; whom he cites, after GROTIUS. Both he and GROTIUS might have quoted this rhetor, tho they were far from doing so, against EUSEBIUS, who was unwilling to allow that the Supreme Being was acknowledged by the heathens before christianity had enlightened the world: but the quotation of him, on this occasion, proves nothing, and serves only to shew that

our divines declaim as loosely as the heathen philosopher. MAXIMUS of Tyre alledges the universal consent of mankind in one law or tradition : so I believe those words *νομον και λογον*, should be translated, *legem famamque*, and not, as TILLOTSON translates them, law and principle. Now this law and tradition, according to MAXIMUS of Tyre, declares that there is one God, the king and father of all things ; and several other gods, the sons of the Supreme, who take their parts with him in the government of the world. MAXIMUS was a Platonician, and he meant, no doubt, to give reputation to the dogmas of his sect, by assuming them all to be received in one general tradition by the Greek and the barbarian ; by those who inhabit the continent, and by those who live on the coasts of the sea ; by those who have wisdom, and by those who have none. TILLOTSON was a Christian, and he meant to make the dogmas of his sect, as well concerning the beginning of the world, as concerning the creator of it, to pass for those of universal tradition. If we suppose that the first men were led, instantly, by the phaenomena, and without any other demonstration, to acknowledge a supreme intelligent cause, the opinion rose from the fact, of which they were witnesses ; but it was opinion still in them, tho it became afterwards demonstrated knowledge. Now divines transpose this order, and make the creation of the world, which tradition vouches primarily, to be, as it were, a secondary tradition ; that is, they make the tradition of fact to follow the opinion,

opinion, instead of making the opinion to be founded on the fact. They give great advantage to the atheist, by blending all these things together; for the atheist will not, tho the theist will, distinguish what they have confounded. He will look on all these different propositions alike, and as traditions only of different opinions.

AFTER having said, what has been here said, concerning the advantage, which, I apprehend, that divines give to atheists by the absurd manner in which they employ tradition, I will observe another advantage, which the atheist may take from some abstract reasonings that they employ to support this tradition. The theist is modest. He is content to know what God has done, and he acknowledges it, for that very reason, wise and good, right and fit to be done. But the divine is not so modest. It is not enough for him to know that God made the world, and to fix the time when it was made: he presumes, with much theological ostentation, to explain the motives that determined the Supreme Being to create the world and the inhabitants of it, men at least. The atheist objects that these motives must have been eternal, since the divine attributes, from which they are deduced, are certainly eternal, in the system of the divine; and that it is impossible, therefore, to conceive that the Supreme Being should neglect doing, during an eternity, what it was conformable to his wisdom and goodness, and suitable to his power, from all eternity to do. The divine
may

may say, and he will say, no doubt, that, whenever God, who is himself eternal, had created the world, an eternity must have preceded this creation ; and that the objection, the atheist makes, would be just as strong, if he assumed that the world began six millions of years sooner, as it is when he places the aera of it according to the jewish and christian chronology. He will employ the same sort of reasoning, in this case, against the atheist, which the atheist employed against him in another ; that is, in the case of the commencement of arts and sciences ; he will put the atheist on proving that it implies contradiction to believe God eternal, and not to believe the eternity of the world. To this, it may be, the atheist would reply, that the contradiction in believing one and not believing the other arises, like a self-evident truth, from what the divine himself affirms ; and that the evidence is too great to need any demonstration, and therefore incapable of any, like many other truths of which we have an immediate, intuitive, perception. From hence the atheist would insist that all the motives, which the divine asserts a Supreme Being had to create the world in time, are unanswerable reasons to prove it eternal ; arguments for his system, in part at least, and as far as the eternity of the world is concerned in the whole,

A THEIST, who stood by, might, perhaps, suggest to the divine an expedient whereby to get out of the difficulty, wherein he has involved himself by presuming to specify the motives which the
 Supreme

Supreme Being had to create the world in time. The theist would advise him, like a good ally (for such he is sometimes to the divine, tho he is never such to the atheist, as the divine is on some occasions) he would advise, I say, the divine to keep a little more precision in the use of words. Sometimes the world stands for the whole universe, and sometimes for our planet only. The divine must understand it as MOSES does, and believe, by consequence, that the whole universe began to exist, when MOSES tells him that the sun, our earth, the other planets, in short, our solar system, began to exist: for the legislator of the Jews included no other in his idea of the universe. He would advise the divine, therefore, to distinguish better between the universe and the world; to affirm that our planet, or, at most, our solar system, began in time (which is the utmost that MOSES can be understood to have meant) and to affirm nothing of the universe, of which MOSES knew nothing; and he only knows that it is. Thus the reasons he gives why God created the world, we inhabit, no sooner, may be a little better supported than they can be on the supposition that he created nothing before it, and was the eternal cause of no such effects, as his physical attributes enabled, and his moral attributes required, him to produce. The theist might add, that, tho we should suppose the universe to be eternal, like it's Author, the eternal effect of an eternal cause, nothing will hinder from assuming at the same time, on the faith of tradition, as he does, or on this and other foundations,

tions, as the divine does, that our world, and even our solar system, began in time. A constant rotation from existence to non-existence, or from generation to dissolution, and so back again, maintains our world and the inhabitants of it in being. Why should not such a rotation of worlds and systems of worlds maintain the universe in being?

BUT it is time to consider the historical, as we have considered the traditional, proofs, which the archbishop brings of the beginning of the world. I will quote his own words, as they stand in BARBEYRAC's translation; for, if I did not quote them, you would hardly believe that I make him say no more than he did say. He says, then, "We have
 " likewise an history of the commencement of
 " the world, the most antient and the most credible that could be desired. This history is that
 " of MOSES; an author so antient, that no other
 " can stand in competition with him in this
 " respect. I might add, that this writer has all the
 " characters of a divine authority; and prove it by
 " such good reasons, as would give a great weight
 " to his testimony in the minds of all those who
 " believe a God. But such arguments are not
 " proper to be employed against the atheist, with
 " whom we dispute at present. I ask no more,
 " than that the same credit may be given to
 " MOSES, as we give to every other historian.
 " Now this cannot be refused him reasonably, since
 " he is quoted by the most antient heathen historians,

“rians, and since the antiquity of his writings
 “has never been contested by any of them, as
 “JOSEPHUS maintains.”

THIS is my text. I shall make some few remarks upon it, and this general remark in the first place. It has been said, truly enough, that the court of Rome has established many maxims and claims of right, by affirming them constantly and boldly against evident existent proofs of the contrary. The jewish and the christian church have proceeded by the same rule of policy: and the authority of the pentateuch, to say nothing here of the other books of the Old testament, has been established entirely and solely on affirmation, the affirmation of the Jews; or, at best, on seeming and equivocal proofs, such as JOSEPHUS brings; against such evident marks of falshood as can be objected to no other writings, except to professed romances, nor even always to them.

It was the pride of the Jews to believe themselves, and to make others believe if they could, not only that their nation was the elect people of God, but that it was of an immense antiquity, and that they possessed the most antient of all authentic records. JOSEPHUS (who had as much of this pride about him as any Jew or Pharisee of them all, and who stuck as little at any absurdity, as any antient or modern rabbin) endeavoured to promote these opinions among the Greeks and the Romans by his writings, tho with very little success. TILLOT-
 SON,

SON, like other christian doctors, had a better motive than that of mere ambition, tho it was not quite foreign from ambition neither, to support the authority of the pentateuch. Whether JESUS CHRIST, or St. PAUL, abolished the ceremonial law of MOSES, or whether the former grafted on this law, as the latter thought fit to graft on his gospel, let us leave it to divines to decide. In all cases christianity was founded on judaism, and the New testament supposes the truth of the Old. Our divines, therefore, are obliged to support the Old as well as they can, in order to support the New. The authority of these books is maintained, in some countries, by inquisitors and hangmen. In a country like ours, where arguments alone can be employed, divines may be indulged in the use of all the good and the bad indifferently, that they may give up nothing; for where every part may be alike attacked, every part may be alike defended. Two cautions, however, these reverend persons would do well to observe. One, to insist chiefly on the external proofs of the divine authenticity of the scriptures, and to pour forth, on that head, all their stock of Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, and Latin; but to dwell very little on the internal marks of a divine character. They might silence those perhaps, on the first kind of proof, by their translations and commentaries, whom they will never convince, on the second, by fair reasoning; and might avoid a great deal of that blasphemy which they talk on both: a circumstance, surely, that deserves some regard from them.

them. Another caution is this, that they should make war rather defensively than offensively; that they should take the only true advantage of the discretion of their adversaries, which would be to return it with discretion: for their adversaries seldom speak out, nor push the instances and arguments they bring as far as they might be carried. Instead of which these orthodox bullies affect to triumph over men who employ but a part of their strength; tire them with impertinent paradoxes; and provoke them by unjust reflections, and, often, by the foulest language.

AFTER this long, and, I hope, charitable remark, it is time to consider how TILLOTSON proves that we have historical, as well as traditional, evidence of the beginning of the world. This evidence is that of MOSES: and, to give it the more weight, he insists on the great antiquity of the historian. This antiquity will not be disputed, perhaps; and it will be allowed that no other history of the same assumed antiquity has come down to us. But then it will be asked, what materials MOSES could have before him when he writ the book of Genesis, which is in some sort a preface to the pentateuch, or at least, the first chapters of it, wherein he relates most circumstantially the creation of the world, and the whole progress of that great event? Divines have their answer ready. MOSES was not a cotemporary author, but he might write upon cotemporary authority. Twenty-five centuries passed indeed between the creation and him, but his materials

materials were, notwithstanding that, extremely fresh and authentic, since they must have gone through very few hands, in ages when men lived so long, to come into his, whether we suppose them written or unwritten. This may be said, it has been often said, and always very weakly to the purpose that is mentioned here; for, if MOSES had taken his materials from the mouth of ADAM himself, they would not have been sufficient vouchers of all that he relates. ADAM might have related to him the passages of the sixth day, something even of his own creation, at least from the moment that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: but ADAM could have told him nothing that preceded this, even on the sixth day, nor, by consequence, on the other five, wherein the whole material world was created. MOSES therefore, notwithstanding his antiquity, may afford an instance in proof of the universality of the tradition, but no more. His writings afford no historical evidence.

Our archbishop assures us that he could have added to the antiquity of this historian certain characters of a divine authority, and have supported them by reasons which would give great weight to his testimony in the minds of all those who acknowledge the existence of God. It is pity he did not think fit to give these characters and reasons; since, however improper it might have been to urge them against an atheist, who denies the existence of God, as well as the commencement

ment of the world, they would certainly have been urged very properly against a theist, who, acknowledging both, believes nothing of the divine character of MOSES. But he was too much attached to a rigorous precision, and used too much candor, in his reasoning, to mingle the atheist and the theist together in this dispute. All he desires is what he thinks cannot be reasonably refused him, that we give the same credit to MOSES, as we should give to any other historian. We will consider then, in the last place, what characters of a divine authority may be found in the writings of MOSES: and from this consideration we shall find reason, perhaps, to be the less concerned that we have not those which TILLOTSON kept to himself on this occasion. In the mean time, let us continue to judge of MOSES as we should do of any other historian, since it is all that is desired of us.

Now to constitute the authenticity of any history, these are some of the conditions necessary. It must be writ by a cotemporary author, or by one who had cotemporary materials in his hands. It must have been published among men who are able to judge of the capacity of the author, and of the authenticity of the memorials on which he writ. Nothing repugnant to the universal experience of mankind must be contained in it. The principal facts, at least, which it contains, must be confirmed by collateral testimony, that is, by the testimony of those who had no common interest of country, of religion, or of profession, to disguise or falsify the

truth. That MOSES was not a cotemporary author is allowed ; and that he could have no cotemporary authority for the greatest part of what he advanced concerning the creation, is proved. Thus far then his writings have no historical authenticity. Let us see whether they have it in any of the other respects which I have mentioned. Were they published among people able to judge of them and of their author ? HUETIUS, who writ an Evangelical Demonstration, and died a sceptic, admits, in his demonstration, that a book, to be deemed authentic, must have been received, as such, in the age which followed immediately the publication of it, and in all the ages which followed this. Has it been sufficiently proved that the mosaical history was so received ? I believe not. There was, it is said, by ABBADIE I think, a law of MOSES, before ESDRAS, before JOSIAH, and even before DAVID, since this famous prophet and king speaks continually of the law of God, and since all the other prophets quote the most important passages of Deuteronomy. The pentateuch too must have been in their hands, since they shew, very clearly, that they had an exact knowledge of the facts contained in Genesis, the least circumstances of which are referred to by them as circumstances that no man could be ignorant of. If MOSES writ the history contained in the book of Genesis, he writ all the other books that compose the pentateuch. ABBADIE assumes that this cannot be denied, and that MOSES must needs have been a good scribe, since it was he who recorded, in writing, the words of the covenant made at Horeb.

It would be hard to find an example of greater trifling: for when we have allowed that the authors of the Old testament, from DAVID down to ES-DRAS, speak not only of the law, but refer to many of the facts related in the pentateuch, it will not follow necessarily that the pentateuch, which we have in our hands, was published in the time of MOSES or immediately after it. Much of the history, and some of the law, perhaps, contained in the writings ascribed to MOSES, came down to those, who quote them, by traditions of uncertain original, tho they were all alike ascribed, by the Jews, to the same legislator. This cannot appear improbable to any one who considers that establishments, said to be made according to the law of MOSES when the custom of reading this law once in seven years to the people was neglected, and when they had actually no body of law extant amongst them, are mentioned sometimes in the bible. This had been the case when HILKIAH found the law in the temple, which had been lost long before, and continued to be so during the first eighteen or twenty years of good JOSIAH's reign. That the book, thus found, contained nothing but the law of MOSES, strictly so called, or than the recapitulation of it, made in Deuteronomy, not the mosaical history, we may, nay we must, conclude from the little time that the reading the book in the presence of the king, and before it was sent by his order to the prophets HULDAH, took up.

THE Jews had an oral, as well as a written, law; and the former has been deemed even more important than the latter. The former however consisted of nothing more than traditions, which the rabbin JUDA HAKKODOSH, or the holy, compiled, six or seven centuries after ESDRAS had compiled the canon of the scriptures. In short, there seems to have been two collections of antient jewish traditions made at different times; and the authors, who preceded ESDRAS, might quote those of one sort, as authentic facts and divine laws, just as well as the doctors, who preceded rabbi JUDA, quoted those of the other, as a commentary on them given by God himself on mount Sinai. It will be said, I know, that the authenticity of the pentateuch given us by ESDRAS is sufficiently proved by the conformity it has, in most instances, with the pentateuch of the Samaritans, that is of the Cutheans, a people sent from the other side of the Euphrates by SALMANASAR to inhabit the country of Samaria, which he had depopulated. This people knew nothing of the mosaical law till ASARHADDON, the successor of SALMANASAR, sent a priest of the Jews to instruct them in it, who might carry, for aught we know, a pentateuch written in antient hebrew characters with him. I enter into no examination of these precarious accounts, lest I should go out of my depth; neither need I to do so: for if we allow that the pentateuch was public before the time of ESDRAS, JOSIAH, or even DAVID, will it follow, that it was so as early as would be necessary to

to answer that condition of authenticity which we speak of here? Was there not time more than enough between MOSES and DAVID to make fabulous traditions pass for authentic history? Did it take up near so much to establish the divine authority of the Alcoran among the Arabs, a people not more incapable to judge of MAHOMET and his book, than we may suppose the Israelites to judge of MOSES and his book, if he left any, whether of law alone, or of history and law both?

THE time, that the Israelites passed from the exode under MOSES, and the four centuries, that they passed afterwards under their judges, may be compared well enough to the heroical age of the Greeks. Marvellous traditions descended from both, and their heroes were much alike. Those of the Greeks were generally bastards of some god or other, and those of the Jews were always appointed by God to defend his people, and to destroy their enemies. But AOD, one of these, was an assassin; and JEPHTHA, another, was a captain of banditti, as DAVID was, till, by the help of the priests, he obtained the crown; after which, under him, and his son SOLOMON, the government of the Israelites took a better form; arts and sciences were cultivated, and their historical age might begin. It has been urged, by those who scruple little what they say, that the four centuries which the Israelites passed under their judges, were times of adversity and oppression,

pression, wherein they had something else to do, than to invent fabulous traditions; or that, if any such were invented so near the times of MOSES and JOSHUA, they must have been detected by the Israelites themselves, who would have been far from encouraging traditions so injurious to neighbouring nations, of whom they had reason to stand in awe. Thus it seems that times of ignorance, barbarity, and confusion, were the most unlikely to give rise and currency to fables, and the most proper to preserve the truth of traditions, which must, for this ridiculous reason, have come down uncorrupted and unmixed. One can hardly imagine any thing so extravagant: and yet I can quote, from ABBADIE, a way of reasoning that is more so. You have thought, I doubt not, hitherto, like other men of sense, that the consistency of a narration is one mark of it's truth; but this great divine will teach you, that the inconsistency, not the consistency, is such a mark. MOSES, he says, is so inconsistent with himself, that he establishes the existence of one God, and then talks as if there were many. He introduces JACOB wrestling against God, and the mortal comes off victorious. Could he have advanced such an apparent absurdity, if the fact had not been true? He advanced it, because he knew it to be true, tho he did not understand it. Just so he talked of several lords, who appeared to ABRAHAM under the forms of angels, without knowing what he said, tho ABBADIE knew that the angel of the covenant was one of them: by which I profess myself not to know

know what ABBADIE meant, or what they mean, who say that this angel was the Son of God. Thus a new rule is added to the canon of criticism by this learned divine.

ANOTHER condition of the authenticity of any human history, and such alone we are to consider in this place, is, that it contain nothing repugnant to the experience of mankind. Things repugnant to this experience are to be found in many, that pass however for authentic; in that of LIVY for instance: but then these incredible anecdotes stand by themselves, as it were, and the history may go on without them. But this is not the case of the pentateuch, nor of the other books of the Old testament. Incredible anecdotes are not mentioned seldom and occasionally in them: the whole history is founded on such; it consists of little else, and if it were not an history of them, it would be an history of nothing. These books become familiar to us before we have any experience of our own. The strange stories they relate, represented in pictures or in prints, are the amusements of our infancy; we read them as soon as we learn to read, and they make their impressions on us, like the tales of our nurses. The latter are soon effaced, tho sometimes with difficulty; because no one takes care to preserve them, and care is taken, in a good education, to destroy them. But the others are industriously renewed, and the most superstitious credulity grows up along with us. We may laugh at Don

QUIXOTE, as long as we please, for reading romances till he believed them to be true histories, and for quoting archbishop TURPIN with great solemnity ; but when we speak of the pentateuch as of an authentic history, and quote MOSES as solemnly as he did TURPIN, are we much less mad than he was ? When I sit down to read this history with the same indifference as I should read any other, for so it ought to be read to comply with all that archbishop TILLOTSON requires of us, I am ready to think myself transported into a sort of fairy-land, where every thing is done by magic and enchantment ; where a system of nature, very different from ours, prevails ; and all I meet with is repugnant to my experience, and to the clearest and most distinct ideas I have. Two or three incredible anecdotes, in a decade of LIVY, are easily passed over : I reject them, and I return, with my author, into the known course of human affairs, where I find many things extraordinary, but none incredible. I cannot do this in reading the history of the Old testament. It is founded in incredibility. Almost every event contained in it is incredible in it's causes or consequences : and I must accept or reject the whole, as I said just now. I can do no otherwise, if I act like an indifferent judge, and if I give no more credit to MOSES than to any other historian. But I need say no more on this head. No one, except here and there a divine, will presume to say, that the histories of the Old testament are conformable to the experience of mankind and to the natural

natural course of things. I except here and there a divine, because I remember one, who, speaking of the conversation of the serpent with the first woman, and the other circumstances of the fall of man (that he may avoid the explanations given by the rabbins of this story, or that of PHILO, a little less extravagant than the others, all which turned the whole into allegory) has the front to assert, that there is nothing incredible in this relation, literally understood.

THE next condition of historical authenticity is this, that the facts, the principal facts at least, be confirmed by collateral testimony. By collateral testimony I mean the testimony of those, who had no common interest of country, of religion, or of profession, to disguise or falsify the truth; as I expressed myself above. Thus too it is necessary that we express ourselves in order to prevent a common theological sophism. HUETIUS says, in the place to which I have referred already, that an history is deemed to be true, when other histories relate the same facts, and in the same manner. But it is not enough that the same facts are related, even in cotemporary, or nearly cotemporary, books; since, if the authors of these books were such as I describe, all these testimonies would be in effect but one; as all those of the Old testament, which confirm the mosaical history, are in truth but one, the testimony of MOSES himself.

JOSEPHUS

JOSEPHUS attempts to support this history by collateral testimonies, those of Egyptians, Phenicians, Chaldeans, and even Greeks. But these testimonies, were they never so full to his purpose, would cease to be collateral testimonies by coming through him, who had a common interest of country and religion to disguise and to falsify truth. If we examine the use he makes of the fragments he cites from MANETHO, concerning the shepherd-kings, and many other citations in his works, we shall find abundant reason to suspect him of both. EUSEBIUS is a collateral witness as little, as he; and yet from these two quivers principally have all the arrows employed to defend the authenticity of the Old testament been drawn. They are blunt indeed; and nothing can be more trifling than the use that has been made of them by antient and modern scholars. Whenever these men find, in profane history or tradition, the least circumstance that has any seeming relation to sacred history, they produce it as a collateral testimony; and sometimes even the similitude of sounds is employed for the same purpose, with a great apparatus of learning. But nothing can be more impertinent than this learning. The man, who gives the least credit to the mosaic history for instance, will agree, very readily, that these five books contain traditions of a very great antiquity, some of which were preserved and propagated by other nations, as well
as

as by the Israelites, and by other historians, as well as by MOSES. Many of them may be true too: but, I think, they will not serve to vouch for one another in the manner they must do to become such collateral testimonies as are required. That the Israelites had a leader and legislator called MOSES, is proved by the consent of foreign, whom I call collateral, witnesses. Be it so. But surely it will not follow that this man conversed with the Supreme Being face to face; which these collateral witnesses do not affirm. The Israelites were an egyptian colony, and conquered Palestine. Be it so. It will not follow, that the red-sea opened a passage to them, and drowned the Egyptians who pursued them. It will not follow, that the possession of the land of Canaan was promised to their father ABRAHAM four hundred years before, as a consequence of the vocation of this patriarch, and of an alliance which God made with him and with his family. A great number of instances might be brought of the same kind; and such instances might serve to prove the authenticity of those histories, which the monk of Viterbo endeavoured to impose on the world under the names of MEGASTHENES and other antient writers, just as well, as they serve to prove the authenticity of those which we ascribe to MOSES, or JOSHUA, or any other supposed writers of the Old testament.

THE three or four antient neighbouring nations, of whom we have some knowledge, seemed to

to have had a common fund of traditions, which they varied according to their different systems of religion, philosophy, and policy. We may observe this, if we compare the traditions of the Arabs, descended from the Ismaelites, with those of the Jews descended from the Israelites. Human tradition for human tradition, the former deserve as much credit as the latter. Why then do we put so great a difference between them? Have we any reason for it, except the affirmation of one of the parties? ABBADIE will tell you that we have, because the Jews were a people of sages and philosophers. The best excuse, that can be made for the poor man, is to say, that he became, soon afterwards, mad enough to study the Apocalypse, and to believe that he found a hidden sense in it. The truth is, that ignorance and superstition, pride, injustice, and barbarity, were the peculiar characteristics of this people of sages and philosophers. The principles of their religion formed them to every part of this character. Their priests, who had the care of their religion and the keeping of their records, as we are told, maintained them in it; and whether their history was such, as we see it, before the days of ESDRAS and NEHEMIAH, or nothing more than broken traditions, collected and put together by them in the present form; thus much is certain, that the same spirit breathes through the whole, and that the character of the nation appears evidently in every part of the composition. It has been said, I know, of the pride of this people particularly, that

that their scriptures were not contrived to flatter them in it, since their revolts, their apostasies, and the punishments which followed them, as well as the discourses of their prophets, filled with the most mortifying reproaches, and the most terrible threatenings on the part of God, are set forth in these books with every aggravating circumstance. But this evasion will strengthen, instead of weakening, what I have said. It is true that the Jews are often represented in them like rebellious children, but they are always represented like favorite children. They abandon God's law and his worship; they depose him; they chuse another king in his place: still his predilection for this chosen people subsists; and if he punishes, it is only like an indulgent parent, to reclaim them, and to shew them the same favor as before. In short, he renews all his promises to them; future glory and triumph; a Messiah; a kingdom that shall destroy all others, and last eternally; "*consumet universa regna, et ipsum stabit in eternum.*" Thus was the pride of this people kept up by incredible stories about the past, and incredible prophecies about the future; and with their pride, even to this day, their ignorance, their enthusiastical superstition, and in principle, if not in effect for want of power, their injustice and their barbarity. Thus we see that the authenticity of the mosaical history, and the other histories of the Old testament, has no sufficient collateral testimony; but rests solely, or principally, on the good faith of a people, who deserve,

deserve, on many accounts, to be trusted the least ; and of whom we may say, that it is improbable their history should have been written, and impossible that it should have been preserved, with a strict regard to truth.

I MIGHT rest the matter here, if it did not come into my thoughts to expose a sophism that has been employed by those who defend the authenticity of this history. If they cannot shew that it is confirmed by collateral and foreign testimony, cotemporary or nearly cotemporary, they hope to confirm it by assuming that relics continued long among the Jews, and that festivals and ceremonious institutions continue still : all which are so many cotemporary proofs ; since they must have been cotemporary, in their origin, with the facts to which they are relative. The proof is precarious, in the mouth of one of your divines, who have abused it to establish so many pious frauds, and the belief of so many foolish legends : but it becomes contemptible when it is employed by one of our divines, who declaim so much against the use that has been made of it in your church. With what face can he talk to us, like ABBADIE, of the rod of AARON, of the pot of manna, or of the figures that represented rats and the privy parts of the Philistines ? Would the man prove his sincerity to us, as he proves that of MOSES, by his contradictions and inconsistencies ?

THE relics, so long preserved, exist no where out
of

of the books whose historical authenticity they are advanced to prove: and if they did exist, we should be obliged to reject them, or to admit many of the grossest impositions that have passed on popular credulity. Did not the priests of Delphi shew the very stone that SATURN swallowed, when he intended to devour JUPITER? Was there not an olive-tree at Troezene, or somewhere in Greece, in the time of PAUSANIAS, which bloomed and bore fruit, which had been the club of HERCULES, and which this hero had planted, just as JOSEPH of Arimathea planted his stick that became a miraculous thorn at Glastonbury? The institution of festivals and ceremonies proves as little, as relics. Tho supposed cotemporary, they may owe their original to some fabulous traditions; or if really cotemporary, they serve as well to prove all the ridiculous circumstances that have been blended with the tradition, in process of time, as the fact which they were designed to record. The Israelites had their sabbath of days, their sabbath of years, and their weeks of years. Will it follow that God was employed six days in the laborious work of the creation, and that he rested the seventh? The passover, and other institutions, served to commemorate the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt, and their transmigration into Palestine. But will they serve likewise to commemorate all the incredible circumstances which had been added to the tradition of a very credible, and, no doubt, of a very true, event? Collateral testimony proves the event; but these
supposed

supposed cotemporary institutions cannot stand in lieu of collateral testimony to prove the circumstances. Whether the event be true, or whether it be false, such institutions will confound the truth of the event with the falshood of the circumstances in one case, and will vouch for both alike, in the other. The death of MOSES, who certainly died, is confounded with the circumstances that accompany it in the last chapter of Deuteronomy; circumstances absurd and profane; and yet, if the Jews commemorate the true fact, they must commemorate, on this principle, all the circumstances that are related in the bible, and in their oral traditions. A good Iman believes piously the ascension of MAHOMET, on the faith of his traditions, and of the ceremony by which it is annually commemorated. The ascension and the circumstances of it are false alike, the ceremony vouches for all alike; and he must believe, not only the ascension of MAHOMET, but, that the angel GABRIEL brought, by night, to his sepulchre, a flying horse, called Borak, which the prophet mounted and rode on horseback into heaven. Shall the annual ceremony, which confirms the whole account alike, make us believe that MAHOMET went to heaven, or hinder us from placing this story in the same class with that of ASTOLPHUS and his hippogryphe? We shall believe no part of it: but the good Iman is obliged to believe the whole.

THE little I have said makes it plain enough,
and

and more particulars in so plain a case would be superfluous, that if we take TILLOTSON at his word, if we give only the same credit to MOSES, which we give to every other historian, and no more, his history cannot pass, according to any rule of good sense or true criticism, for authentic. But other divines are not so generous: they give up nothing; and, therefore, when they cannot maintain weak arguments of one kind, they have recourse to another hypothesis, and affirm this history to have been writ by men under the immediate influence of divine inspiration, and to be, therefore, of divine authority. For this they have the word of JOSEPHUS, and the unanimous attestation of the jewish and christian churches. But all this will not amount to proof, unless it may be said that they, who cannot give to this history even the appearance of human, can give it the appearance of divine, authenticity. That sameness of spirit, which runs through all this history, and which appears in all the writings of the jewish prophets, confirms one thing that JOSEPHUS says. A distinct order of men, priests and prophets, among the Jews as well as the Egyptians, published the sacred writings of these people: and these writings were received on the faith of this order of men, who had the same temptations to impose, and the same opportunities of imposing, in both countries. JOSEPHUS boasts the integrity of these men, and the strict regard which they paid to truth, in Egypt as well as in Palestine; and his testimony will be of as

much weight in favor of one, as in favor of the other, that is, of none at all. The sacred writings of the Egyptians had no more authority out of Egypt than the polytheism, superstition, and idolatry of other nations gave them: and the sacred writings of the Jews were never received as such out of Judaea, till the propagation of christianity carried them abroad. Christianity abrogated the law, and confirmed the history, of MOSES, from the time at least, when ST. PAUL undertook, like a true cabalistical architect, with the help of type and figure, to raise a new system of religion on the old foundations.

No proof of this kind, therefore, affording pretence to say that the scriptures of the Israelites, any more than those of the Egyptians, are of divine authority; our divines turn themselves to declaim on certain undoubted marks of it, which are to be found, they assume, in the books themselves that the canon of the Old testament contains. Let us say something on this subject. It deserves our utmost attention. Let us compare some of these supposed marks of a divine original with those of an human original, which will stare us in the face, and point out, plainly, the fraud and the imposture. I use these words with great freedom. I think myself obliged, in conscience, to do so: and before I conclude, you shall judge of the reasons for which I think in this manner and hold this language.

We are told, in some theological declamations, that

that the revelation made to the Israelites, and taught in their scriptures, corrected the false ideas of paganism; as it appears by the examples of SOCRATES and PLATO, who borrowed, from the writings of the Jews, the best and soundest parts of their philosophy: which has been proved over and over by learned antiquaries *. It is a sufficient answer to this, to say, that the fact is false. Christians, as well as Jews, have asserted it; but it is false to say, that they have proved it. Neither PLATO, nor SOCRATES, nor PYTHAGORAS, nor the Egyptians and Chaldeans, their masters, appear to have borrowed any thing from the Jews, tho MOSES had been instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and tho the Jews, both before and after ESDRAS, borrowed evidently, as evidently as any such thing can appear at this distance of time, from the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and even the greek philosophers, from PLATO and from ZENO for instance. At other times we are told, that the soul of man knows neither whence it came, nor whither it is to go; that these are points concerning which human reason must be always in doubt, and which were clearly determined by the jewish revelation. We find this asserted very magisterially; but if we have recourse to the Bible, we find no such thing. MOSES did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor the rewards and punishments of another life, tho it is possible he might have learned these doctrines from the Egyptians, who taught them

* ABBADIE.

very early, and yet not so early perhaps, as they taught that of the unity of God. When I say that MOSES did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor future rewards and punishments, my reason for it is, that he taught neither when he had to do with a people, whom even a theocracy could not restrain, and on whom, therefore, terrors of punishment future as well as present, eternal as well as temporary, could never be too much multiplied, nor too strongly inculcated. MOSES, the greatest of their prophets, knew nothing of this immortality; and SOLOMON, the wisest of their kings, decides against it. The texts in EZEKIEL, and others, which are alledged to prove that this doctrine was part of the jewish system, are too modern to prove it; and they admit, besides, of a different sense. In short, this doctrine does not appear to have prevailed amongst them till they became acquainted with greek philosophy, and instead of lending to PLATO borrowed from him. This pretended mark of divinity may be ascribed therefore, if it be one, to pagan philosophy, but it cannot be so to jewish theology: and, I cannot help using an expression of one of these declaimers*, who write as if they were preaching, and to apply it to the whole tribe. They would do well to think a little better beforehand, and to respect their readers a little more.

WHEN these men talk of the characters of a divine original, which are to be found in the books

* ABBADIE.

of the Old testament, they must mean nothing, or they must mean to say that these books are more perfect, according to our ideas of human perfection, whether we consider them as books of law or of history, than any other writings that are avowedly human. Now if this be what they mean, nothing can be more false. They cannot deny that pagan philosophers enjoined a general benevolence, a benevolence not confined to any particular society of men, but extended to the great commonwealth of mankind, as a first principle of the law of our nature. The law of the Jews exacted from them all the duties necessary to maintain peace and good order among themselves: and if this be a mark of divinity, the laws, which rapparees and banditti establish in their societies, have the same. But the first principles, and the whole tenor, of the jewish laws took them out of all moral obligations to the rest of mankind: and if MOSES did not order them to have no benevolence for any who were not Jews, “*erga nullum hominem benevolos esse*,” as LYSIMACHUS pretended, yet is it certain that their law, their history, and their prophecies, determined them to think themselves a chosen race, distinct from the rest of mankind in the order of God’s providence, and that they were far from owing to other men, what other men owed to them and to one another. This produced a legal injustice and cruelty in their whole conduct; and there is no part of their history wherein we shall not find examples of both, authorised by their law, and pressed upon them by their priests and their prophets.

IN the systems of pagan philosophy we are exhorted, says another of these declaimers, to love virtue for her own sake; but the jewish divines, rising much higher, exhorted us to love virtue for the sake of God. But can there be any thing so impiously interested and craving, as the sentiments ascribed to the patriarchs by Moses, and the principles of his own law? “If God will be with me, “and will keep me in this way that I go, and will “give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so “that I come again to my father’s house in peace; “then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone “which I have set for a pillar shall be God’s house, “and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee *.” This was JACOB’S vow, and the conditional engagement which he took with God. If we turn to the twenty eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, we shall find that MOSES, on the renewal of the covenant between God and the people, employs no arguments, to induce the latter to a strict observation of it, of an higher nature than promises of immediate good, and threatenings of immediate evil. They are exhorted to keep the law; not for the sake of the law, not for the sake of God; but for considerations of another kind, and wherein not only their wants were to be supplied, but all their appetites and passions to be gratified. If they hearkened diligently to the voice of the Lord, they were to be set on high above all the nations of the earth;

* Gen. xxviii.

they

they were to be the head, and not the tail; to be above only and not beneath; all the people of the earth were to fear them; all their enemies were to be smitten before their face, and they who came out against them, one way, were to fly before them seven. These were objects of ambition. Their basket and their store were to be blessed, they were to grow rich, they were to lend to many nations, and to borrow from none. These were objects of avarice. They were to be blessed every where, in the city and in the field, in the fruit of their bodies, in the fruit of their ground, and in the fruit of their cattle, and of their flocks of sheep. These were objects of all their other appetites and passions. God purchased, as it were, the obedience of a people he had chosen long before, by this mercenary bargain. It was ill kept on their part; and the law with all these sanctions was continually violated, sometimes rejected, and had in no degree a force sufficient to maintain itself in observation and reverence.

THE most excellent constitutions of human government and systems of human law become often useless, and even hurtful, either in a natural course of things, or by extraordinary conjunctures, which the wisdom of legislators could not foresee. One of the most conceivable perfections of a law is, that it be made with such a foresight of all possible accidents, and with such provisions for the due execution of it in all cases, that the law may be effectual to govern and direct these accidents.

instead of lying at the mercy of them. Such a law would produce it's effect by a certain moral necessity resulting from itself, and not by the help of any particular conjuncture. We are able to form some general notions of laws thus perfect: but to make them is above humanity. Another of the most conceivable perfections of a law consists in the clearness and precision of it's terms: and, even in this, the greatest legislators have often failed. The terms become equivocal or obscure, if they were not so originally, by the endeavours of those, who fear the law, to elude it; and of those, who get by their explanations or judgments, to perplex the meaning of it. But that which is ideal perfection, not real, among men, will be found, no doubt, and ought to be expected, when God is the legislator. If it is not so found, all that can be said about marks of divinity in any law, that pretends to be revealed and enacted by God, is mere cant.

To apply these reflections the more strongly, it will be proper to consider the law of MOSES relatively to the first of the perfections mentioned, as a law given to the Israelites alone: and to consider, relatively to the second, the whole body of their law, and their history, which is a sort of commentary on their law, not only as given to them, but as given to all mankind, for purposes the most important to their common welfare. If eternal wisdom dictated the laws, and inspired these historians and prophets, in all their writings, eternal

wisdom knew from the first all the uses they were to serve in time ; and by consequence, whether we regard the jewish economy alone, or that of judaism and christianity together, the whole system of law, history, and prophecy, must be exactly proportioned, as the means to all these ends.

On the first head, we cannot read the Bible without being convinced that no law ever operated so weak and so uncertain an effect, as the law of MOSES did. Far from prevailing against accidents and conjunctures, the least was sufficient to interrupt the course, and to defeat the designs, of it ; to make that people not only neglect the law, but cease to acknowledge the legislator. To prevent this, was the first of these designs : and if the second was, as it was no doubt, and as it is the design or pretence of all laws, to secure the happiness of the people, this design was defeated as fully as the other ; for the whole history of this people is one continued series of infractions of the law, and of national calamities. So that this law, considered as the particular law of this nation, has proved more ineffectual than any other law, perhaps, that can be quoted. If this be ascribed to the hardness of heart and obstinacy of the people, in order to save the honor of the law, this honor will be little saved, and it's divinity ill maintained. This excuse might be admitted in the case of any human law ; but we speak here of a law supposed to be dictated by divine wisdom, which ought, and which would have been able, if it had been such, to keep
in

in a state of submission to it, and of national prosperity, even a people rebellious and obstinate enough to break through any other. If it be said that the law became ineffectual by the fault of those who governed the people, their judges and their kings; let it be remembered that these judges and kings were of God's appointment, for the most part at least; that he himself is said to have been their king during several ages; that his presence remained amongst them, even after they had deposed him; and that the high-priest consulted him, on any emergency, by the Urim and Thummim. Occasional miracles were wrought to enforce the law: but this was a standing miracle that might serve both to explain and enforce it, by the wisdom and authority of the legislator, as often as immediate recourse to him was necessary. Can it be denied that the most imperfect system of human laws would have been rendered effectual by such means as these?

It may not be amiss here to compare the effect of this law, before the captivity of Babylon, with that which it had afterwards. Ten tribes of this chosen people had been, for their disobedience, dispersed, and, we may say, lost in the east, long before the reign of NEBUCHODONOSOR. This prince completed the ruin of the whole nation. He burned their temple, and their city, and carried the two remaining tribes into captivity. This captivity is said to have lasted but seventy years: and the Jews had carried into it so little respect for their law, so little

little regard to their history, and so little trust in the prophecies, which had been published both before and during this time, that they seemed to have forgot them all when CYRUS gave them permission to return to their country, and to rebuild their temple. He did more than give them permission; he gave them encouragement; and among other instances of it, he restored the sacred vessels which had been taken from them. What happened on this great revolution? ZEROBABEL gathered, with much trouble, a small number of the Jews, who were willing to return into their own country on this great revolution; and even these were the dregs of the people. The most considerable of them, and, among these, twenty of the four and twenty orders of priests that had been carried to Babylon, chose rather to stay there than to return to the holy city, tho that was the place appointed by God for their sacrifices, and the most august ceremonies of their religion. Fourscore years intervened between the return of ZEROBABEL and the arrival of ESDRAS at Jerusalem. The temple and the city, probably, had been rebuilt, but the law cannot be said to have been restored. Many things, directly contrary to it, were practised openly and without scruple. Thus, for example, not only the people, but the Levites and the priests, married strange women, women who were not of their own country. ESDRAS, and NEHEMIAH after him, neglected nothing to restore and preserve the observation of the law: and for this purpose they took means very different from those which MOSES had

had

had instituted, and much more effectual. One of these means, and perhaps the most effectual, was the institution of synagogues, which became so numerous, that wherever there were ten Jews, it is said, there was a synagogue. In these the law was read and explained once every week; whereas it was to be read but once in seven years, and the people were obliged to go up to Jerusalem to hear it, according to the mosaic institution. The consequence was, that, notwithstanding some schisms, some apostasies, and other revolutions which happened in the church and state, the Jews in general signalised themselves by a greater and more constant attachment to their religion and law.

ANOTHER perfection of law consists in the clearness and precision of the terms: and, in these respects, we propose to consider this body of history, of prophecy, and of law, relatively not to the Jews alone, but to the rest of the world likewise. Now the language, in which this law was given, and in which we must suppose that the histories and prophecies were written, as well as the law, unless we suppose these to have been written in, or after, the time of ESDRAS, is, the learned say, of all languages the most loose and equivocal; and the style and manner of writing of the sacred authors, whoever they were, or whenever they lived, increase the uncertainty and obscurity even of any other language. How should it be otherwise, when the same passages may be taken in historical, mystical, literal, and allegorical, senses; and when

when those who writ them knew so little what they writ, that they foretold some future, when they imagined they were relating some past, event? Lord BACON, indeed, says, that the sacred authors had a special privilege of recording the future, as well as the past, in history. But I suppose his lordship to have been no more in earnest when he said this, than he was in writing his christian paradoxes. To supply these defects, the Jews have recourse to an oral law, and christians to the decisions of councils. Strange methods indeed! history may explain or control tradition, but it is quite absurd to explain or control history by tradition. Councils were composed of men whose pretensions to inspiration deserve nothing but our contempt: and, therefore, it is equally absurd to explain or control the word of God by the judgment of these men, whether in their assemblies, or separately. St. JEROM complains, in one of his letters*, that they dragged the text to favor their particular sentiments, how repugnant soever to it. But this text does not seem to want so much dragging. The ambiguity of it makes it supple enough; and sentiments, the most contrary to one another, are equally well supported by it. If we add to these considerations that of the infinite number of copies, of versions, and of versions of versions, which have given occasion to many alterations and interpolations, that are to be found, without going to SPINOZA, to HOBBS, or to the fanciful author of the pre-adamiticial system, we must be, I think,

* Ad PAUL.

convinced, that the Bible, which we call the word of God, is as little fit, by the manner in which it has been preserved, to be an uniform foundation of universal religion, as by the manner in which it was writ and first published to the world.

DIVINES have their answer ready, and I hear, methinks, a great bishop of your church ask me, with that air of superiority to which no man of his age had a better claim, whether the authenticity of these books diminishes, because some explanatory additions may have been inserted, because some errors may have slipped by accident into the text, or because the mistakes of copists have given occasion to various readings? Shew me, says the right reverend person, if you can, any law, any doctrine, any ceremony, any miracle, or any prophecy, that has been added. Are not all the writings of the profane authors, whom you deem authentic, come down to you in the same manner as those of the holy penmen? I reply, My objection and my complaint are, that the manner, in which these books were writ, were published, and have been preserved, makes it impossible to do this. Could we do it, could we distinguish between what is original and what not, the objection would vanish, and the complaint cease. But both will remain in force till then; because of the vast difference that there is between the importance of these and of all other writings. The laws of PLATO, the odes of HORACE, and the history of LIVY, may have been corrupted without any ill consequence

quence to those who read them. But the same cannot be said of the laws of MOSES, of the psalms of DAVID, and of the history of the Old testament.

I HAVE been long enough on the defensive. It is time I should attack in my turn, and shew you for what reasons I cannot believe that the pentateuch, and the other books of the Old testament, were writ under a divine influence, and have any right to be called the word of God. There may be some defects in human laws, some falsities or mistakes in human histories, and yet both of them may deserve all the respect and all the credit, on the whole, that the writings of fallible men can deserve. But any one defect, any one falsity, or mistake, is sufficient to shew the fraud and imposture of writings that pretend to contain the infallible word of God. Now there are gross defects, and palpable falshoods, in almost every page of the scriptures, and the whole tenor of them is such, as no man, who acknowledges a supreme, all-perfect Being, can believe to be his word. This I must prove; and when I have done so, divines may call me theist, or atheist, if they please. I shall not be ashamed of the first character, and shall leave them to purge themselves of one as absurd as the last. That the Jews held the unity of God is true: and that their father ABRAHAM might have learned this doctrine among the Egyptians, tho it has been said, very foolishly, that he acquired great wealth by instructing that people in philosophy and the other sciences, is true likewise: but
it

it will not follow that he, or his posterity, adored the true God. There are many passages in Job, in Isaiah, in the Psalms, and in other parts of the Old testament, which give most sublime ideas of the majesty of the Supreme Being; and which have been founded, for that reason, very high. But it will not be hard to quote mahometan, and even pagan, writers, who have spoke of him with as much nobleness of style, and with as much dignity, as any of these: whilst, on the other hand, it will be easy to quote many things imputed to the Supreme Being by these, at least as unworthy of him, as any which the Mahometans, or even the most extravagant of the pagans, invented. Sublime expressions concerning the Deity may serve to shew that the imaginations of those, who used them, were heated by the enthusiasm of poetry and devotion: they will not prove the writers to have been divinely inspired; and it will become nothing less than blasphemy to assert that they were so, when they impute, at the same time, such things to the Divinity as would bring disgrace on humanity.

I know, for I can demonstrate by connecting the clearest and most distinct of my real ideas, that there is a God, a first intelligent Cause of all things, whose infinite wisdom and power appear evidently in all his works, and to whom, therefore, I ascribe, most rationally, every other perfection, whether conceivable or not conceivable by me. A book is put into my hands, which is, I am told, and have been

been told from my youth, the word of this God, and wherein I shall find the whole scheme of things which he has established, and the whole economy of his providence. What I learned before by rote, I consider with more attention; and am far from finding in it the Supreme Being, whose existence and attributes I demonstrate. The scene opens, indeed, by the creation, and this creation is ascribed to one God; that of the material world, at least: for when this God proceeds to the creation of man, he calls on other Beings, we know not by the text how many, to co-operate with him, and to make man in his and their likeness. This seems to lay a foundation for polytheism, and I am startled at it, because it is inconsistent with that unity of the godhead which my reason shews me, and which the general tenor even of the mosaïc law and history asserts. The divine, on the contrary, triumphs in the passage; because he drags it, against reason, and this revelation both, to signify the three co-equal persons in one godhead, which no reason can comprehend, which no revelation affirms explicitly, and which has no foundation, except that of a theology much more modern than this.

THE more I compare what MOSES says of this God, and by a supposed inspiration from him, the more repugnant I find the whole to demonstrated, and even to obvious, truth. Nothing can better resemble modern rabbinical traditions, than these antient and mosaical traditions: the same

ignorance of nature, physical and moral, the same irreverent conceptions of the Supreme Being, prevail in both. MOSES, they say, was divinely inspired: and yet MOSES was as ignorant of the true system of the universe, as any of the people of his age. I need not descend into particulars to shew this ignorance. To evade the objection drawn from it, we are told that he conformed himself to that of the people. He did not write to instruct the Israelites in natural philosophy, but to imprint strongly on their minds a belief of one God, the creator of all things. Was it necessary to that purpose that he should explain to them the copernican system? No most certainly. But it was not necessary to this purpose, neither, that he should give them an absurd account, since he thought fit to give them one, of the creation of our physical, and, we may say, of our moral, system. It was not necessary he should tell them, for instance, that light was created, and the distinction of night and day, of evening and morning, were made before the sun, the moon, and the stars, which were “set
 “ in the firmament of heaven to divide the day
 “ from the night, and to be for signs and for seasons,
 “ and for days and for years.” It was not necessary that he should tell them, how this moral system was destroyed by the wiles of a serpent, and by the eating of an apple, almost as soon as it began, against the intention, as well as command, of the Creator. Besides, MOSES must be considered as appointed and inspired by God to write, not only for his own age, but for all future ages; for the

the most enlightened as well as for the most ignorant: in which case, that his history might answer all the designs of eternal wisdom, it should have been proportioned to the ignorance of the Israelites, as little able to understand one system of philosophy as another, without giving so much reason to people, better informed, to believe him as ignorant as any uninspired person could be.

If the ignorance and the errors, which betray themselves very grossly in the writings ascribed to MOSES, make it impossible to believe such an author divinely inspired; the confused, inconsistent, and unworthy notions of a Supreme Being, which appear in his writings, shew very evidently that the true God was unknown to him. He acknowledged but one God, and the people were forbid to worship any other. But then he put this one God to as many and as unworthy uses, in the service of man, as the heathen put their many gods, of different orders: and he was, therefore, in this respect more inconsistent than they were. The God of MOSES creates the world, makes man, and repents of it immediately, for a reason which he might have prevented by a little less indulgence to, what is called, free will. As soon as this indulgence had given an opportunity to the serpent to tempt EVE, and to EVE to tempt ADAM, who should have known the nature of serpents better, since he had just given to all animals the names that were proper to them; in short, as soon as they had eat the forbidden apple, and were fallen, they

heard the voice of God, who was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. He condemned them for their disobedience : he cursed the earth, for their sakes, and the serpent above all other beasts. Their eyes were then opened, they knew that they were naked, and they made themselves aprons of fig-leaves, which served to cover their nudity, till God made them coats of skins for that purpose, and then drove them out of paradise. Thus death and sin entered into the world, and the crime of this unhappy pair was punished in their whole posterity. This strange story, so trifling and so serious, and wherein God is made a principal actor with the serpent and ADAM and EVE, has given occasion to much silly pains that have been taken both by Jews, and Christians, to lessen the absurdity of it, if that were possible. Since it is impossible, some have attempted to explain the whole allegorically ; and it may not seem improbable that this allegory had been invented, among other egyptian mysteries, to signify the introduction of physical and moral evil into the world, by the fault of man, and against the design of God. This however cannot be admitted by Christians ; for if it was, what would become of that famous text whereon the doctrine of our redemption is founded ? The whole therefore must be understood literally : and in that case the God who made the world and man, that is the Supreme Being, is the same God who walks in the garden to enjoy the cool of the evening, who tries this famous cause, and insults our first parents by irony and sarcasm.

Thus again, and to shew in another instance what inconsistency, as well as absurdity, Moses imputed to his one God, let us observe that he makes this God repent a second time that he had made man on the earth, because “he also was
 “flesh, every imagination of his heart was evil,
 “and all flesh had corrupted his way.” For this reason he resolved to drown the whole world, and every living creature in it, except one man, called NOAH, his family, and as many birds, and beasts, and creeping things, as was necessary to replenish the earth. This resolution taken, the God of MOSES orders NOAH to build an ark, or clumsy chest, in the fashion and in the proportions he prescribes very minutely. This done, he crowds all the living creatures he intended to save, men, and birds, and beasts, and insects, into the ark; tho great scholars pretend to shew, by a fair calculation, that far from being crowded, there was ample room for them all in it. As soon as they were in, God shut the door upon them, the deluge began, and had it’s full effect. When it was over, and as soon as God smelled the sweet favor of a burnt offering on the altar NOAH had erected, he repented again, and resolved not to curse the ground any more for man’s sake, nor for a reason which should have hindered him from doing it at all, tho he had done it twice already. He established a covenant with NOAH, with his sons, and with their posterity; and that he might remember this covenant, between him and the earth, or every living creature

upon the earth, which he had promised to drown no more, he declares to them the institution of a rain-bow, designed to put him in mind of his promise, whenever he should bring a cloud over the earth.

ABRAHAM descended from NOAH by SHEM, and God made a new covenant with him and his posterity. The Supreme Being condescended to be the tutelary God of ABRAHAM, ISAAC, and JACOB, and under this character he acted a part, which a sensible heathen, not transported by presumptuous notions of his own importance, nor by the impudence of enthusiasm, would have thought too mean and too low for any of his inferior gods or demons. The whole history, from NOAH to ABRAHAM, and from ABRAHAM to the exode, is a series of tales, that would appear fit to amuse children alone, if they were found in any other book, tho they served two great purposes of pride and ambition among an ignorant and barbarous people. They served to give JACOB the preference, over a much better man, over his brother ESAU. He acquired indeed this birth-right, and the prior blessing of a doating father, by a most infamous fraud: but the fraud was sufficient, even in the eye of God, to give the descendants of the younger brother, the Israelites, an entire preference over the descendants of the elder brother, the Edomites, and to set the former in the place of his favorite people. The same tales served the ambition, as well as the pride, of the former, who claimed, on their authority,

rity, as the legitimate offspring of ABRAHAM, a right to the land of Canaan, which God had given to ABRAHAM, and to all the glorious promises which he had made to that patriarch. The other nations of the earth were plunged in idolatry; God left them in it; he neglected them, and thought it enough to preserve the knowledge of himself and the purity of his worship in Palestine: for which purpose he gave a particular law, as well as the country of the Canaanites, to the Israelites. If we consider his laws, as means of preserving monotheism, and the purity of worship, in opposition to polytheism and superstition, we shall find that no means could be worse proportioned to this end. If we consider the manner, in which this people was conducted, by God himself, out of Egypt into the promised land; how they acquired the possession of it, by his immediate assistance, and by the execution of his orders, signified to their leaders; we shall find that nothing can be conceived more unworthy of an all-perfect Being. In order to preserve the purity of his worship, he prescribes to them a multitude of rites and ceremonies, founded in the superstitions of Egypt, from which they were to be weaned, or in some analogy to them. He succeeded accordingly. They were never weaned entirely from all these superstitions: and the great merit of the law of MOSES was teaching the people to adore one God much as the idolatrous nations adored several. This may be called sanctifying pagan rites and ceremonies in theological language; but it is profaning

faning the pure worship of God, in the language of common sense. In order to make good his grant to ABRAHAM of the land of Canaan, he orders the posterity of this patriarch to conquer it, and to exterminate the inhabitants. Just so the leaders of Huns, of Goths, and Vandals, might, and did, make good their promises with the people who followed them. Just so the Spaniards made good the decree of ALEXANDER the sixth, when they conquered America. PIZARRO was not more cruel than JOSHUA; nor the franciscan monk, who accompanied him in his expedition against ATAHUALPA, so cruel as SAMUEL, who spoke in the name of the Lord. The franciscan monk excited the soldiers to kill the king of Peru in the heat of battle. The jewish priest hewed the king of the Amalekites to pieces "before the Lord," in cool blood; and SAUL was deposed for the clemency he had shewed, tho he too had exercised cruelty enough to sate any human ferocity.

I AM not ignorant of the arbitrary assumptions, and silly evasions, which are employed to soften and excuse such acts of cruelty, by antient fathers, and modern commentators. You may remember that we read together, not long ago, the answer which CYRIL of Alexandria writ to the emperor JULIAN, after the death of this emperor. When we laid aside the Billingsgate, and the long recriminations, by which, if he could not defend MOSES, he tried to revenge himself on PLATO, we found little, or nothing, in it that deserved attention,

tention, except for it's absurdity : for absurdity deserves some attention to warn us against it. The men who justify such cruelties, as I have mentioned, and many others, which might be cited from the Old testament, upon any hypothesis whatever, must have very ill hearts, as well as heads ; and he, who imputes them to the Supreme Being, is worse than an atheist, tho he pass for a saint.

It is very unnecessary, in writing to you, that I should dwell upon the stale theological artifices, that are employed to get over such objections as have been raised against the books of MOSES, and the other books of the Old testament. The most absurd things they contain are called, sometimes, types and figures, tho they have no more relation to the things said to be typified and signified by them, than to any thing that passes now in France. Others of the same kind are called allegories, and are explained, not by the book wherein they are found, but by some fanciful commentary on them. Sometimes the order of allegory is inverted, and things plain in themselves are assumed to be allegories, in order to establish, upon them, such doctrines as suit theological hypotheses ; many examples of which may be found in the writings of St. PAUL. But the great expedient they employ, after him likewise, is that of mystery ; when things, that stand in flat contradiction to the divine attributes, and that can be neither disguised by allegory, nor softened by analogy, are urged against them. When a theist sees nothing repug-

nant

nant to the wisdom and power, or any other attributes, of a supreme, all-perfect Being, in the works of God, and therefore thinks himself justified in rejecting the impiety of those who would impose on him, as the word of God, a book which contains scarce any thing that is not so, the divine has recourse to exclamation. Restrain your profane temerity, he cries. The wisdom of God is not like the wisdom of man, nor the justice of God like the justice of man: and who art thou, O man! who presumest to sound the depths of either? There is something so impudent, as well as absurd, in this proceeding, that, common as it is, one can see no example of it without surprise: for what can any man mean, who insists that I should receive these books, as the word of God, on account of the evident marks of a divine original which he pretends to shew me in them, and then stops me in this examination, by assuming the very thing that is in question? There are many appearances, no doubt, in the physical and moral systems, which may pass for mysteries because we cannot fully comprehend them; but there is nothing in either of these, repugnant to any excellency which we ought to attribute to the Supreme Being. We confess our ignorance; but we do not therefore call in question the divine attributes, nor disbelieve these systems to be his work, nor the law of nature to be his law. Had we the same certainty that the Jewish scriptures were his word, we might reason in the same manner about them. But we cannot believe them to be his word, tho we know that
the

the physical and moral systems are his work, whilst we find in them such repugnancies to the nature of an all-perfect Being; not mysteries, but absurdities; not things incomprehensible, but things that imply, manifestly, contradiction with his nature. They imply it so strongly, that if we believe in MOSES and his God, we cannot believe in that God whom our reason shews us; nay, we must believe against knowledge, and oppose the authority of jewish traditions to demonstration.

HERE will I conclude, having said enough, I think, to shew that the beginning of the world is sufficiently proved by the universality of tradition; that the testimony of MOSES cannot be reputed an historical testimony, if we give no more credit to him than we should give to any other historian; and that we cannot admit his testimony for divine without absurdity and blasphemy.

The end of the Fifth volume.

the physical and moral systems are his work, whilst we find in them such repugnancies to the nature of an all-wise Being; not mysteries, but absurdities, not things incomprehensible, but things that imply manifestly contradiction with his nature. They imply, that if we believe in him, we must believe against knowledge, and oppose the authority of Jewish traditions to demonstration.

There will I conclude, having said enough, I think, to show that the beginning of the world is satisfactorily proved by the universality of tradition; that the testimony of Moses cannot be reputed an historical testimony, if we give no more credit to him than we should give to any other historian; and that we cannot admit his testimony for divine without absurdity and blasphemy.

The end of the Fifth volume.

THE END OF THE JEST

The first of the two parts of the book is a history of the jest, from its origin in the Middle Ages to its present position in the literature of the nineteenth century. The second part is a collection of jests, arranged in alphabetical order, and including many of the most famous and most original of the jests of the past and present.

The book is written in a simple and straightforward style, and is intended for the general reader. It is not a work of scholarship, but a work of popular literature. It is a book that will be read with interest and amusement by all who are fond of jest and humor.

The end of the Jest - done



Bolingbroke, Henry St. John,

The Philosophical Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John, Lord
Viscount Bolingbroke In Five Volumes

Bd.: 5

London (1754)

Ph.u. 55-5

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10045276-3